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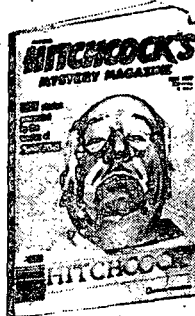
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a NEW Simon Ark story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Edward D. Hoch's first published short story was titled "Village of the Dead," and it appeared in the December 1955 issue of "Famous Detective Stories." Nearly 23 years and 400 Hoch short stories ago! Mr. Hoch's first story featured a character named Simon Ark who claims to be "nearly 2000 years old," formerly a Coptic priest in Egypt, now doomed to roam the world "seeking a final confrontation with Satan" and all that is evil on this earth.

There have been two paperback collections of Ark stories—THE JUDGES OF HADES and CITY OF BRASS (both Leisure Books, 1971). Though usually described as tales of the "occult," with Simon Ark generally referred to as a "fantasy figure," it should be made clear that the stories scrupulously avoid fantasy. True, there are "suggestions" of fantasy, but as a detective Simon Ark has no magical powers; his solutions to mysteries, however bizarre, are always based on deductive reasoning and logical inference.

Here is the first Simon Ark story to appear in EQMM. It is an engrossing tale of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Gold Lion and of five sections of a parchment map showing, in red ink, a circle of thirty dots, with an inner horseshoe of five pairs of dots, and a larger dot near the center; and above the open end of the horseshoe is an X.

"X marks the spot"—and X, that letter and symbol of mystery, opens the door to still another "series by Hoch" in EQMM...

"Q"

THE TREASURE OF JACK THE RIPPER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Before recounting the remarkable events surrounding the search for the lost treasure of Jack the Ripper, it might be well to say a few words about my friend and occasional companion Simon Ark. It was Simon who brought the affair to a satisfying conclusion, as he has so many other times in the 22 years I've known him.

I was a young newspaper reporter when I first met Simon Ark back in the mid-fifties. I'd been sent to a remote western town to report on an apparent mass suicide. Simon was there too, looking tall and imposing and very old. He told me later that he was nearly 2,000 years old, that he'd been a Coptic priest in Egypt, and now was doomed to roam the world like some Flying Dutchman or Wandering Jew, undying, seeking a final confrontation with Satan and all that was evil on this earth.

Did I believe any of that?

Frankly, no. Not at first, anyway. I married a wonderful girl named Shelly Constance and moved from a career in journalism to one in publishing. When Simon Ark reappeared in my life, as he kept doing at irregular intervals, I was an editor at Neptune Books. Whether I believed his story or not, I realized his vast knowledge of the occult and the mystic arts could be put to good use. He wrote a book and I published it. This was, after all, the era when every mystic had a book to publish.

In recent years Simon and I drifted apart. I was a middle-aged editor no longer quite up to the sudden journeys to Egypt or Poland or London that used to fascinate me in the old days. And for all I knew, Simon himself might have died of old age. Because I never really believed all that business about Simon being 2,000 years old, did I?

It had been fully five years since our last adventure together when suddenly he was back, on the other end of the telephone, acting as if he'd seen me not ten minutes earlier.

"Hello, my friend."

© 1978 by Edward D. Hoch.

"Simon! Is that really you?"

"Are you free for lunch?"

"Of course! But what—?"

"I could not pass through New York without telephoning my publisher now, could I?" I knew his face would have that familiar sly smile as he said it.

I arranged to meet him at one o'clock at a steak house near my office. It had a small back room where customers could talk or drink away the afternoon without interruption, and I often took my authors there to iron out some sticky point in their plots or in our contracts.

"You look the same," I told Simon, meaning every word of it. His large body and worn but vigorous face reminded me of our first meeting 22 years earlier.

"You are looking good too, my friend. Putting on a little weight, though. How is Shelly?"

"She's fine. Away visiting her mother in Florida at the moment."

"Ah, then you're alone?"

"Yes," I admitted reluctantly.

"Come to England with me," he said suddenly.

It was the sort of spur-of-the-moment suggestion I would have relished in the old days. "I can't, Simon. I have my work."

"We shall have some high old times, as we did in the old days."

"Still chasing the Devil?"

"Yes. It is an eternal quest." His face had gone solemn at my question. "Satanism has become a new fad among many young people."

"I've been reading about the resurgence of witch cults in England. Is that what you're after?"

He shook his head. "Something far more evil, my friend." The old eyes flashed with a familiar fire. "The treasure of the late Jack the Ripper."

"At least you admit that he's dead. Every once in a while someone tries to prove he's still alive. But I never heard of any treasure."

"I have a communication from a man in London named Ceritus Vats. A collector of esoterica. He feels my presence is needed to forestall a murder. And to find a treasure."

I thought about it. I still had a week's vacation coming, and June was a slow time in publishing. The autumn books were al-

ready in various stages of production, the concern of other people, and I wouldn't have to finalize our spring list for months yet. Shelly would be at her mother's place another week. There was no real reason why I couldn't go, except common sense.

And I'd never let that stop me before.

If Simon Ark was going to find a treasure belonging to Jack the Ripper, I wanted to be along for the show.

I phoned Shelly in Florida, to tell her what was up. She'd always had mixed feelings about Simon Ark, and I knew she was far from delighted to have him back in our lives. But she didn't argue about the trip. She only said, "Be careful," and then, "I'll see you next week."

At ten o'clock the following night Simon and I were airborne over the Atlantic. It had been a bumpy takeoff from Kennedy, in the midst of an early summer rainstorm, but the flight quickly settled down to a smooth uneventful crossing. "What have you been doing with yourself these past five years?" I asked Simon.

He smiled. "Five years is merely a weekend to me, my friend. A pause, a rest from the search. As a matter of fact, I was studying at an Irish abbey for part of the time. I had only just returned to America when Ceritus Vats got in touch with me."

"What sort of man is Vats? And how did he know where to reach you? I've never known your address in all these years, except for the brief times you stayed with Shelly and me."

"Ceritus Vats is a bookseller among other things. He operates from a little shop off Hammersmith Road in London. He knows my wants in certain fields, and he knows an address where I may be reached."

"You mentioned esoterica. The mystic arts, I suppose."

"In this case, yes, though he deals in a wide range of books and maps. Anything old or rare."

I was prepared to meet a man who went with his name, but Ceritus Vats was a surprise. Our first afternoon in London was misty with a damp June rain, but the shop of Ceritus Vats was warm and brightly lit. He was a short handsome gentleman with white hair, who moved between the stacks of old books with a nimbleness born of long experience. Though the shop had the traditional hodge-podge look of a good second-hand book store, I never doubted that he could lay his hand on any title in the place at a moment's notice.

"So good to see you again, Simon," he said with a smile. "And it's a pleasure to meet you, sir."

I shook his hand and sat down. "I notice a few of our Neptune Books have drifted across the sea to England."

"Quite a few, actually. Neptune is a fine American house."

Simon cleared his throat, anxious to get down to business. "You can speak freely in front of my friend here. He's shared many adventures with me."

Vats glanced at me a bit uncertainly, then replied, "Very well. Of course you're familiar with Jack the Ripper and his crimes."

"I am," Simon said. "Unfortunately I was not in London at the time, or I might have brought the criminal to justice."

I was used to this sort of talk from Simon, and apparently Vats was too. He hurried on. "Nowadays the killing of five prostitutes on the streets of London would hardly attract all that fuss."

"Perhaps it would," Simon said. "If done in the manner of the Ripper's killings."

"You mean the mutilations?"

"And the letters to the newspapers. He was nothing if not a showman."

Ceritus Vats leaned back in his chair. "Suppose I told you I have evidence that the Ripper was neither a madman nor a sex fiend, but only a coldly calculating killer whose motive was financial gain!"

"I'd find that difficult to believe," Simon said.

"And suppose I could name the Ripper?"

"Do so, by all means!"

"Recently a remarkable document—a handwritten journal—was offered to dealers in rare books and esoterica, like myself. Its author purports to be none other than Jack the Ripper himself. In this journal he explains the motive for his crimes, and reveals his identity. I must say that the handwriting compares favorably with that in reproductions of the Ripper's newspaper letters."

"Who is offering this journal?"

"A great-granddaughter of the man who wrote it. Her name is Glenda Coxe. His was Raymond Slackly."

"I've never heard of Slackly," Simon admitted. "Nor the woman either, for that matter."

"According to the journal, Raymond Slackly was a small-time thief. He'd once knifed a man in a brawl, but he admits to no other prior violence. Sometime in the mid-1880's he teamed up

with another thief named Hogarth, a smarter criminal who expanded both their horizons. After a number of profitable robberies they heard about the heist of a lifetime.

"It seems that 1887 was Queen Victoria's Jubilee year, the fiftieth anniversary of her coronation. To celebrate the event a merchant named Felix Rhineman collected contributions for the crafting of a solid gold lion encrusted with fifty diamonds. It was to be a surprise gift to Victoria from London's merchants, presented during the summer Jubilee week. Only a few people knew of it in advance, but unfortunately one of them let something slip in a pub. Hogarth and Slackly learned of the golden lion and managed to steal it on the eve of the presentation. The matter was hushed up to avoid embarrassment and Queen Victoria never knew of it."

"Do you believe all this?" I asked with an editor's natural skepticism. "That sort of thing went out with the Maltese Falcon!"

Ceritus Vats merely smiled. "It's possible your Mr. Hammett got his idea from legends about the golden lion. Certainly I demand proof for such a story—but the map is proof of a sort."

"What about Jack the Ripper?" Simon pressed on. The lines of his face were deep and his eyes were veiled.

"Hogarth and Slackly were afraid to offer the lion for sale once they'd stolen it. And they possessed neither the knowledge nor equipment to melt it down. They decided Hogarth would bury the treasure in a safe place for five years, at which time they would then take the lion abroad and sell it."

"Where was it buried?"

Vats shook his head. "Hogarth never told Slackly. He claimed that Slackly drank too much and had a loose tongue. But Slackly insisted he draw a map of the location, in the event he was arrested for some other crime. Hogarth agreed to draw a map in five parts, and to leave one part with each of five London streetwalkers. They were paid to keep it, with more money promised in five years' time. Only Hogarth and Slackly had lists of the prostitutes' names."

"An unlikely story," Simon remarked.

"But is it? For the money, and the promise of more money, these women could be depended on. The parts of the map would remain safe. Hogarth seemed certain they wouldn't be lost or misplaced. And even if one of the women died or disappeared, Hogarth himself still knew the location of the treasure. The trouble is, Hogarth died—he was killed in a pub brawl the following

year. Slackly was left with five names and nothing more. According to the journal, he tracked the women down over a period of months but each one refused to give him her portion of the map—he hadn't the money that was promised. So he was forced to kill them, all five, using the mutilations and his letters to the press to hide the true motive."

"Is there any evidence besides the handwriting?" Simon asked.

"The journal is curiously reticent about the specific details of the killings—almost as if Slackly himself could no longer face the memory of them. But he does say he strangled the women before using his knife. Donald Rumbelow's recent book on the Ripper confirms that at least four of the victims were probably strangled first."

"Could I examine this journal?"

Vats shook his head. "I was allowed to read portions in the presence of Glenda Coxe, but she would not let me keep it."

"And the map?"

"That's the strangest part of all. Once Slackly retrieved it and put the pieces together, he found he couldn't read it. That's why he wrote the journal, leaving the map for his heirs."

"I assume Miss Coxe can't read it either, or she'd hardly offer it for sale."

"Correct. She feels the journal and the map themselves are of great value, even if the treasure is never located."

"And certainly they are valuable, if the story is true."

"Can you help me, Simon?" Vats asked.

"Just what sort of help do you need? You asked me to forestall a murder."

Vats nodded sadly. "My own. It is depressing to reach this stage in one's life and realize that a colleague would actually kill you for financial gain."

"And this colleague is—?"

"Martin Rood, an antiquarian bookseller and dealer in esoterica like myself. We've been friendly rivals for years."

"Miss Coxe showed him the journal too?"

"Yes, indeed. She wanted us to bid against each other and she succeeded admirably."

"Has Rood actually threatened your life?"

"Yes. Last week we held a joint meeting with Miss Coxe. When I topped his bid he stormed out, saying if I cheated him out of the journal and map he'd see me in hades. He was not jesting."

"But perhaps he's cooled down by now."

"No. On the morning I cabled you I received a package at my shop here. It was an old leather-bound book with no indication of who'd sent it. When I opened the cover I saw the book had been hollowed out—to make room for a live black widow spider."

"My God!" I breathed.

But Simon did not take it so seriously. "Hardly a serious attempt to kill you, Ceritus, or the book would have contained a bomb rather than a spider. Still, it's a bit unpleasant. You think Rood sent it?"

"Who else? The book was an old regimental history of little value. I almost think I'd seen it on his shelves."

"Have you spoken to him since then?"

"I tried to phone him but he's always out."

"Perhaps a visit to Mr. Rood is in order," Simon decided. "Meanwhile, is it possible that Miss Glenda Coxe has shown this journal to other dealers?"

"I doubt it. Both Rood and I made strong bids for it."

"And the map? Did she allow you to inspect that as well?"

"No. Only the buyer gets to see the map, though she's described it to us as a circle of dots with a horseshoe of dots inside."

Simon Ark lifted his head. "Is that so? And she was unable to identify it?"

"So she says. Do you know—?"

"Just a thought. I'll withhold comment for the present."

"Can you speak to Rood, Simon? Somehow get him off my back so I can close this deal for the journal?"

"I can speak to him. But the police could have spoken to him too. Why didn't you simply call them and tell them about the spider?"

"If the police got wind of this Ripper connection they'd surely confiscate the journal *and* the map. The newspapers would get the story and no one would make a penny out of it!"

"I suppose the monetary factor is important to you."

"Of course it's important. I'm not in this business for my health, Simon! And neither is Rood. This is my chance to acquire the find of a lifetime!"

"Have you and Rood considered sharing it?"

"Share? With him? Never!"

There seemed little more to be said. Simon and I left Vats with a promise to do what we could. But I detected in my friend a de-

pression that our long journey had come to this. "I have known Ceritus for years," he said finally, breaking the gloomy silence, "but I never realized the full extent of his greed. Rood resorts to spiders in hollowed-out books, and Ceritus resorts to me. I am to be the weapon to gain his ends."

"Do you really believe this business about Jack the Ripper's buried treasure?"

"Perhaps this solution is no more fantastic than the original crimes were. However it leaves one fact unaccounted for: if the Ripper was a sane and rational man bent only on finding that buried lion, why did he find it necessary to mutilate his victims after strangling them?"

"He was crazy and this whole business is crazy, if you ask me. Let's forget it and catch the next plane back to New York."

"I think first a few words with Martin Rood are called for. Then perhaps we will leave."

Rood's Rare Books occupied a shop on Bayswater Road, opposite Kensington Gardens. In its cluttered shelves and haphazard piles of books it was much like Vats's shop, but the lighting was dimmer and the odor a bit mustier. And Martin Rood, when he appeared, looked very much like the sort of person who would send black widow spiders in hollowed-out books. He was as tall as Simon, but much thinner, with sunken cheeks and a pale skin that gave him something of a cadaverous appearance.

"What may I help you with today?" he asked. "We have some fine leather-bound volumes of Sir Walter Scott, just purchased from an estate."

"I'm more in the market for regimental histories," Simon remarked. "Perhaps something on the Black Widows."

"Black Widows?" Rood seemed puzzled. "I don't believe I know that regiment."

"Strange. Ceritus Vats thought you could help me."

At the mention of Vats's name, the bookdealer's whole manner changed. I could see the veins in his temples beginning to throb as he said, "I have no dealings with Vats! I know nothing of the lies he may have told you!"

"They concern a certain Miss Glenda Coxe and a handwritten journal dating from the last century."

"Miss Coxe has contacted me, yes. I believe the entire matter to be a hoax. If Vats wishes to spend his money on it, so be it!"

"You didn't mail him a spider in a book?"

"A spider? In a book? What a quaint idea!"

Simon and I exchanged glances. Either Vats or Rood was a consummate liar. And maybe it didn't much matter which one. But then Simon said something which surprised me. "I'm quite interested in Miss Coxe's journal myself. I'd like to make a purchase offer on it."

"You? Who'd you say you were?"

"The name is Simon Ark."

"American?"

"Most recently."

"You don't exactly sound American."

"I'm a mixture," Simon answered with a smile. "Now about this journal—"

"You can't really believe in it? Jack the Ripper and all that?"

"But if it's true, the journal could be worth a fortune."

Rood considered. "How to prove it?"

"Dig up the golden lion. That should prove it."

"Yes, I suppose so."

Simon turned to me. "Come along, my friend."

"Where are you going?" Rood asked.

"To see Miss Coxe, of course. To put in my bid on Jack the Ripper's map."

Simon's performance may have galvanized Rood into some sort of action. We were only a block away from the shop when I turned to see him lowering the sunshade on his front window and putting out the lights. "Looks as if he's decided to close early," I remarked. "Maybe he wants to beat you to Miss Coxe's place."

"Or else he's planning another little surprise for Ceritus. In any event, I think it's time we called on Miss Coxe. She obviously holds the key to this entire matter."

Glenda Coxé was a psychologist doing basic research in animal behavior at a university laboratory located in London's East End. We found it without much difficulty, and after being announced we were greeted by a cool young woman wearing a white lab coat. Her dark hair was pulled up in a knot at the back of her head, and I had the impression that she might be far prettier if she allowed her hair to hang free. It took me a moment to remember that this was, supposedly, the great-granddaughter of Jack the Ripper.

"Gentlemen, I hope it won't take too long. I'm timing an exper-

iment with some rats." Her voice was cool and dispassionate, like the rest of her.

"In a maze, no doubt," Simon said.

"What?"

"The rats are in a maze."

"Yes, they are. But I'm sure you didn't want to talk about rats."

"As a matter of fact, we came to talk about this journal which has suddenly come to light. And a map, I believe."

"That's correct. Do you wish to purchase them?"

"Could we sit down?" Simon asked, indicating some chairs in one corner. When we were seated he continued, "You realize that this journal of yours could be immensely valuable if it's what you say it is."

"My dear man, I don't say it's anything at all! Perhaps it was a novel my great-grandfather was attempting to compose. I am simply offering it for sale."

"I see. Then you don't believe you're a descendant of Jack the Ripper?"

"I ceased speculating on it long ago. My uncle—" She stopped.

"Your uncle?"

"I was going to say that my uncle does enough speculating for both of us. But that needn't concern you."

"Your uncle believes the journal to be authentic?"

"He does. It's become an obsession with him."

"I'd like to meet him," Simon said.

"That would accomplish nothing."

"Something puzzles me about this whole business, Miss Coxe. When you found this journal, why didn't you take it to the newspapers—or even to a book publisher? Why offer it surreptitiously to a couple of old booksellers?"

"Frankly, I wanted to get rid of the thing. And I didn't want to be plastered across the papers as the great-granddaughter of Jack the Ripper. You must understand that."

"I'd still like to meet your uncle."

"Meet him if you wish, Mr. Ark. But I repeat, it will accomplish nothing."

She gave us his address and then retreated into her laboratory. I decided she wasn't sorry to see us go. Perhaps to her we represented the stigma of publicity she'd tried so hard to avoid.

Or was she trying to avoid it? "Simon, the thought occurs to me that this whole charade might be nothing more than a giant pub-

licity stunt for a new book about Jack the Ripper."

He smiled at me. "British publishers go about things a bit differently from you New Yorkers. I hardly think she's after publicity. At this point we must accept what she tells us at face value."

"And later?"

"After we've met her uncle we might draw other conclusions."

As we drove away we noticed Glenda Coxe leaving through a rear door of the lab. Like Martin Rood, she too was closing early.

Meeting her uncle involved driving to Greenwich, where the Coxe home was located within sight of the Observatory. "Virtually at longitude zero," Simon remarked as we pulled up in front of a red stone house that had obviously seen better days.

His name was Nesbitt Coxe and like the house he had seen better days. Somehow he reminded me of a cross between the two bookdealers, Rood and Vats. He moved slowly, with glasses worn low on his nose so he could peer over them. His hair was thin and he looked unwell, though he couldn't have been more than 50 years old. "Oh, yes," he said. "Simon Ark. My niece warned me you were on your way. It's about the Ripper business, what?"

Simon nodded as we followed him through the downstairs rooms. A woman's touch was obvious here and there, but it did little to alleviate the general gloom. "Do you and your niece live here alone?" Simon asked.

"That's right. Wife left me ten years ago. I'm Glenda's guardian for another three years, till she reaches thirty. Her granddad didn't think women matured till thirty." He thought about it and remarked glumly, "I suppose then she'll toss me out and sell the house. That'll be all the thanks I get for bringing her up and putting her through the university."

"Then her grandfather had money? He would have been the son of this man Slackly?"

Nesbitt Coxe allowed an evil grin to form on his lips. "I know what you're thinking. But the money didn't come from Slackly's criminal activities—and especially not from Queen Victoria's golden lion. Slackly didn't have a son, but a daughter—and she married Herbert Coxe, my father. He was something of a department-store tycoon, with a chain of shops in Liverpool and Bristol and York. Finally opened one in London, but that was his ruin. He couldn't compete with the big boys. Still, there was enough left for me to take care of Glenda when her folks died in a fire."

"Your brother?"

He nodded. "House burned down one night when Glenda was twelve. She lost everything, including her parents. Came to live with me after that. My father was still alive and he left all his money in trust for her till she reached thirty. He felt it would make up for the loss of her parents."

"And this journal?"

"I never knew about it till Glenda showed it to me a few months ago. The map was with it—five little pieces of parchment stitched together, and marked with red dots in a strange sort of ink."

"I'd be most interested in seeing that map," Simon told him.

"That would be impossible unless Glenda approved. This is all hers—the journal and the map, you understand. If it was mine I'd be out selling it to the *News of the World* for a fancy figure."

I was thinking that was why she'd said it would do us no good to see her uncle. Glenda was in complete charge.

He puttered around the house, offered us tea, and finally announced that he had work to do upstairs. That was as close as we came to seeing the mysterious map.

On the way back to London I asked Simon what he thought about it. "Are we in the midst of a hoax, or a feud, or a swindle, or a great historical discovery, or what?"

"I'm not quite sure, my friend. There are several ways of looking at it, and none of them is satisfactory."

Things grew even more puzzling the following morning. Ceritus Vats phoned our hotel quite early to announce that he was being questioned by the police. Glenda Coxe's uncle Nesbett had been murdered the previous night, apparently during an attempted robbery at his home.

The officer investigating the case was Inspector Flaver, a bustling middle-aged man who came right to the point. "So your name is Simon Ark and you're a friend of Mr. Vats. Is that any reason why I should talk to you?"

Simon's last encounter with Scotland Yard had been much too long ago to be meaningful to this man. Nevertheless, Simon told him, "I once helped Inspector Ashly in the matter of some Satanists and an arrow murder. I expect it was before your time."

"Yes, I remember Ashly." He relaxed a bit. "What do you know about this killing?"

"Far less than you at the moment. How did it happen?"

"The niece, Miss Glenda Coxe, who lives with the deceased, was working late at a research laboratory. She returned home around midnight and found him shot to death on the steps going down to the side door. The door itself had been forced open. It looks as if a burglar tried the place, not knowing anyone was home, and Coxe surprised him."

"It looks a great deal like that," Simon agreed. "Does Miss Coxe have an alibi—witnesses who saw her at work?"

"Oh, certainly. You can't suspect her of killing her own uncle, can you?"

"It happens," Simon said. "About what time did the crime occur?"

"About nine, we figure."

"Just getting dark then, this time of year."

Inspector Flaver nodded. "We figure there were no lights on yet. That's why the burglar thought the house was empty. There's a tall hedge on that side which screens the door from the neighbors."

"They heard no shot?"

"Not a thing. But, you know, they had the telly going."

"I'd like to see Miss Coxe," Simon said.

"She's just finishing her statement. Wait here."

Glenda Coxe appeared about ten minutes later, looking tired and a bit bedraggled. When Simon Ark attempted to speak to her she held up a hand in protest. "I've been up all night. I've told the police everything I know. Please let me pass."

"Ceritus Vats is being questioned. Did you give the police his name?"

"They asked why anyone would try to burgle our house. I had to mention the journal I'd offered both Vats and Rood."

"Is Rood being questioned too?"

"I assume so. Now please let me pass."

"Miss Coxe, you must have checked to see if the journal and map were stolen. Were they?"

She hesitated a moment and then answered. "They're both safe. I believe the thief was frightened away after shooting my uncle."

"Miss Coxe, I must see that map at once," Simon insisted.

"That's impossible."

"You don't seem to understand your position at present. If the journal and the map are shown to be frauds, this whole business

could be viewed as a plot to kill your uncle from the very beginning. You present the journal to two rival bookdealers known for their interest in esoterica. One of them is sent a black widow spider, apparently by the other—though I'm sure such creatures are easy to come by in your research labs. When you have the rivalry and tension between the dealers at a fever pitch, someone breaks into your house and kills your uncle. The dealers are suspected, while you seem to have an alibi. And with your uncle dead you don't have to wait three more years to come into your inheritance."

Her eyes flashed with a cold fury. "Who could concoct such a fantastic plot?"

"A psychologist, Miss Coxe. A psychologist who spends her working days sending rats through mazes."

That stopped her. She gnawed at her bottom lip and asked quietly, "What good would it do you to see the map?"

"The description given me, of a circle of dots with a horseshoe of dots within, reminded me of something. I might know the place where the treasure is buried."

"You might know it, when my great-grandfather didn't? When neither my uncle nor I could make anything out of it?"

"This man Hogarth would hardly leave a neatly labeled map in the hands of streetwalkers who were virtual strangers to him. Still, I repeat that I may know the place. You must decide quickly, Miss Coxe. Murder has made this a very serious business."

She hesitated only a moment. "Very well, come with me."

As we followed her in our rented car, I said, "Simon, even if the map and the journal are genuine, that doesn't prove she didn't kill her uncle."

"I know, my friend. But it gives us an opportunity to see this fabled map."

There was no arguing with his logic, so I didn't try. When we reached the house in Greenwich once more, I parked behind her little red car and we followed her inside.

She went at once to a small wall safe and extracted a metal box. Opening it, she took out a faded notebook. "There, gentlemen—the journal of Jack the Ripper. Just as I found it in a trunk in my father's attic."

"At the moment I'm more interested in the map."

She unrolled a small piece of parchment and placed it on the table before us. As described, it consisted of five separate pieces

which had been stitched together. The whole thing had a diameter of perhaps eight inches. On it, marked in red ink, was a circle of 30 dots, with an inner horseshoe of five more pairs of dots, and a larger dot near the center. At the top of the map, directly opposite the open end of the horseshoe, was an X.

"Just as I suspected!" Simon announced triumphantly.

"What is it?"

"A simplified diagram of the rocks at Stonehenge. That's where you'll find Jack the Ripper's lost treasure—if there is a treasure."

Simon telephoned Inspector Flaver and told him we planned to dig at Stonehenge for buried treasure. He suggested the Inspector meet us there, accompanied by the two bookdealers, Vats and Rood. Then he hung up before the questions started coming.

"How can you be so sure it's Stonehenge?" I asked.

"Around 1887 it wouldn't have been uncommon for people to be digging in the area, searching for artifacts of the past. It's only in more recent times that the government has taken steps to preserve and protect these ancient monuments. For Hogarth it would have been the perfect hiding place for his stolen lion."

"But his partner Slackly couldn't read the map even after he recovered its five parts."

"Exactly. He wasn't familiar with Stonehenge and the dots would have meant nothing to him."

The drive to the Salisbury Plain took nearly two hours from London, but when we arrived I spotted the Inspector and the two bookdealers at once. Stonehenge seemed alive with police that day, guarding against possible trouble from a nearby rock concert.

"All right," Flaver said, "we came. This had better be worthwhile."

"It will be," Simon assured him.

We took the tunnel from the parking area, beneath the highway to Stonehenge. The place was filled with summer tourists and a group of youths from the rock concert who were carrying on a sort of chanting ceremony. "They imagine they're Druids," Inspector Flaver explained, "though of course these stones were here long before the Druids came."

We passed through the great stone archways, which somehow seemed smaller with all the people about. Then Simon consulted the stitched-together parchment once more and paced off a distance to the point that seemed to correspond roughly with the

spot on the map where the X was drawn.

"It's far enough beyond the actual monument, so we can dig here," Simon said. "I trust you brought a shovel, Inspector."

"We have one in the car," he admitted.

Finally it was Martin Rood who insisted on starting the digging. "If it's there I want to find it," he said.

Vats tried to pull the shovel from him, but Inspector Flaver intervened. "If you find anything at all, I'm taking it. If there's any truth to Miss Coxe's story, it's the property of the British government."

But after 20 minutes Rood threw down the shovel. "Nothing here," he said, obviously disappointed.

"Perhaps a bit to the left," Simon suggested, consulting the map again. Ceritus Vats took over the digging for a time while the rest of us watched. Some tourists had drifted over, but Flaver's orders to the police on guard kept them away.

After another half-hour's digging Vats gave up too. "If it was ever here, it's gone."

"He would have buried it deeper," Simon speculated, "because of all the digging in the area. He wouldn't have wanted it uncovered by accident."

I jumped into the hole and took up the shovel. We were only down about four feet and Simon's reasoning seemed sound to me. If the treasure was here at all, it would be deeper.

As I plunged the shovel into the earth for the third time I hit something solid. "It could be just a rock," I cautioned, stooping to scoop the dirt away by hand.

But it wasn't a rock. It was something hard and heavy, wrapped in burlap sacking that had partly disintegrated with the passage of time. I unwrapped it and held it high, brushing the clinging dirt from its glistening surface.

"The treasure of Jack the Ripper!" Ceritus Vats said in a voice touched with awe. And indeed it seemed a treasure—a striding lion all in gold, with 50 glistening diamonds set into the body at regular intervals.

Only Simon seemed unimpressed. He took the lion in both hands and hefted it. "The journal said solid gold. I could tell by the ease with which you lifted it that this isn't solid gold. A gold statue of this size would weigh nearly a hundred pounds. And those diamonds are fakes as well."

Vats could not believe it. "But—but something like that could

never be presented to the Queen!"

"Exactly—which leads us to believe it was never meant for Queen Victoria. That merchant, Felix Rhineman, collected the money, had a cheap statue gold-plated and encrusted with imitation diamonds, then dropped word at a place where thieves like Hogarth and Slackly would hear of it. There was no danger from his standpoint. Even if they discovered after the robbery that the statue was a fake they could hardly report it to the police."

"And Rhineman kept the money he collected," I said. "He made a handsome profit and Queen Victoria never really lost anything."

Simon Ark nodded. "The only losers were those five women who carried parts of Hogarth's map."

"Why did Slackly have to kill them, Simon? Especially the way he did?"

Simon Ark took out the parchment map and held it to the light. "This is not the usual parchment, my friend, made from the skin of a sheep or goat. Slackly mutilated their bodies after strangling them so *the missing pieces of flesh would go unnoticed*. You see, Hogarth paid those poor women to let him tattoo the five parts of his map on their skin."

After that Simon walked for a long time with Inspector Flaver. Then Simon and I departed, leaving Ceritus and his rival Rood with Glenda Coxe and the Inspector. "But who killed Nesbett Coxe?" I asked on the drive back. "You never solved it, Simon!"

"My friend, I am not a detective, much as you would like to make me one. I am merely a wanderer, searching the world for evil. At times I find it in unlikely places. At times I find it in the eyes of a twelve-year-old child grown to adulthood."

"You mean—?"

"The story of the Ripper's treasure was either true or false. On the basis of what we found here, we concluded it was true, to the best of Raymond Slackly's knowledge when he wrote the journal. But if the journal is true we must believe that Glenda Coxe found it where she said—in her father's attic trunk. Now her uncle told us yesterday that her house burned down when she was twelve. She lost everything, including her parents. Therefore her discovery of Slackly's journal and the map must have come *before* that fire!"

"Perhaps," I was willing to grant.

"Not perhaps, but certainly! And can you imagine the effect this

discovery would have on a child of that impressionable age? Her great-grandfather—the most terrible murderer in London's history! We know it had an effect on her, because she kept it a secret all these years till now."

But I shook my head. "There's a flaw in your reasoning, Simon. Suppose she found the journal sometime before the fire as you say. It would still have burned up, unless she deliberately removed it from the house before the fire."

"Exactly, my friend."

"You mean she burned down her own house? Killed her own—?"

"And now resurrected the journal to kill again, in such a way that Vats or Rood would be blamed for it. She needed two suspects, in case one of them could prove an alibi for last night. Remember that back door to her laboratory? An easy way out, and back in, while her co-workers thought she never left the building."

"And you told all this to Inspector Flaver?"

"I did. The proof is up to him. I believe he'll start with the fire fifteen years ago."

"And the map, Simon?"

"I think it will go into Scotland Yard's files, along with the journal. Some day, perhaps, when there is not already enough horror in the world, it can be revealed."

We drove on toward London, and that was the last I ever heard of the treasure of Jack the Ripper.

"Q"

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CHALLENGE FOR CHARLIE

by **BRIAN GARFIELD**

This took place several years ago; I must make that clear. Normally Helsinki is one of my favorite towns, but this time I was reluctant to return there because the job was the toughest one Rice had yet put into my ample lap, and the adversary was Mikhail Yaskov, who was—bar none—the best in the business.

Yaskov and I had crossed paths obliquely several times down through the Cold War decades, but I had never been sent head-to-head against him before, and the truth is I was not eager to face this assignment, although—vanity being what it is—I believed I probably could best him. "Probably" is not a word that gets much of a workout in my lexicon; usually I know I can win before I start playing the game; but with Yaskov I'd be dead if I became overconfident.

The job was simple on the face of it: straightforward. As usual the assignment had come to our section because of the odd politics of international espionage which sometimes can cause simple jobs to become sensitive ones. If it's a job that would embarrass anybody, then it usually gets shoveled into our department.

In this case I was America's friendly right hand, extended to a country that needed assistance not because of any lack of skill or courage (the Finns excel in cleverness and toughness), but because of a fine delicacy of politics.

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Finland is virtually the only country to have fought a war with Russia in modern times and not lost it. Finland is the only country in Europe that fought against the Red Army in World War II and did not get occupied by the Russians as a result. Finland is the only country in Europe that has repaid, to the penny, the postwar reconstruction loans proffered by the Western powers. Yes, I like the Finns.

They share a border with the Soviet Union. The world being what it is, they make a few concessions to the Russians by way of trade agreements and the like. Soviet-made cars are sold in Finland, for example, although few Finns choose to drive them; the Finns don't admit it loudly in public but they loathe the Russians, and if you want a clout in the face, a good way to earn one is to state within a Finn's earshot that Finland is within the Soviet sphere of influence.

It emphatically is not; Finland is neither a Communist country nor an intimidated one. It is, however, a nation of realists and while it does not bow obsequiously to the Soviets, neither does it go out of its way rudely to offend them. It treads a middle ground between hostility and friendship, the object being the preservation of Finnish independence rather than the influencing of power blocs. Finland practices true and admirable neutrality.

Mikhail Yaskov was an old-fashioned master spy. He had run strings of agents everywhere in the West—usually with brilliant success. The only American agents I knew of who'd come level against him were Miles Kendig, who was said to be dead now, and my colleague Joe Cutter, who by then was running our operations out in the Far East. I was the only one left in Langley who had a prayer of besting Yaskov, so I was the one picked to fly to Finland.

The KGB had sent Yaskov into Helsinki because of chronic failures in the Soviet espionage network there. The Finns were too shrewd for most of the Russian colonels who showed up at the Soviet Embassy disguised as chauffeurs or Second Secretaries or Trade Mission delegates. The apparatus was a shambles and the Organs in Moscow had dispatched Yaskov to take charge in Helsinki, as if the KGB network were a musical comedy having trouble in New Haven and Yaskov were Abe Burrows sent in to doctor it up.

Yaskov was too sharp to put his foot in anything and there was no likelihood of his giving the Finns sufficient legitimate reason

to deport him. If they declared him *persona non grata* in the absence of clear evidence of his perfidy, it would provoke Moscow's wrath; this Helsinki preferred to avoid.

Therefore as a gesture of good will I was flown to Helsinki to find a way to get Yaskov out of the country and keep him out—without involving the Finnish government.

It was a bloody impossible job against a bloody brilliant opponent. But I wasn't really worried. I'm really the best, bar none.

In my time I have pulled off a number of cute and sometimes complicated capers and I suppose, given my physique (corpulent) and age (well past retirement schedules), I could aptly be called a confidence man rather than a man of action. But Yaskov was not susceptible to con games. He wasn't a man to be fooled by elaborate tricks—he knew them all; in fact, he'd invented most of them.

There really was only one way to attack him—head-on and straight up. And I had only two weapons to employ against him—his own vanity and his awareness of mortality.

I made the call from a public coin phone in the cavernous Stockmann department store.

Comrade Yaskov could not come to the telephone immediately. Could the caller please leave a number to be called back?

No, I could not. I would phone again in an hour. Please tell Comrade Mikhail Aleksandrovitch to expect my call. Thank you.

When I called again Yaskov came to the phone and chuckled at me in his suave avuncular fashion. He had a rich deep voice and spoke excellent English with an Oxford inflection. "How good to hear your voice, Charlie. I do hope we can get together and exchange notes about the Lapland scenery. Two foreigners in a strange land and all that. Perhaps we can meet informally."

"By all means."

It was elementary code, designed to set up a meeting without witnesses or seconds.

I said, "Do you happen to know a fellow named Tower?"

"The Senator from Texas?"

"No. Here in Finland."

"I see. Yes, I know of him."

"Perhaps we could meet him tomorrow."

"Where?"

"I don't mind, Mikhail. You pick a spot."

"Would Tavern Number Four suit you?"

"Fine. I'll see you there." I smiled and cradled the phone.

There was a place called the Tavern Number Four, but we wouldn't be there. The conversation had been designed to mislead anyone who might be eavesdropping on the call—one could depend on the Soviet Embassy's lines being tapped, possibly by several different organizations. The fellow named Tower was a place—the town of Lahti, within fair commuting distance of Helsinki; the town was known for its landmark, a great high water tower that loomed on stilts above the piney landscape. The number four established the time for the meeting.

I was there at three, an hour ahead of schedule, to inspect the area and insure it hadn't been primed with spies or ambushers. My eyes don't miss much; after forty minutes I felt secure and awaited Yaskov openly in the parking lot.

It was a pleasant sunny day with a touch of autumn chill creeping south from Lapland: Lahti is hardly 100 kilometres north of Helsinki, but the forest cools the air.

Precisely at four Yaskov arrived. It might have been seemly and sensible for him to drive himself, in a Soviet-built Moskvitch or Pobeda, but Yaskov was fond of his comforts and he sailed elegantly into view in the back seat of a chauffeur-driven silver Mercedes limousine. Like me he was a man who stood out in crowds—he was not the sort of executive who dwelt in anonymity—and I believe the Organs must have put up with his ostentatious eccentricities on account of the excellence of his performances.

The chauffeur was, so far as I could tell, simply a chauffeur; his face did not flash any mug photos against the screen of my mind. He could have been a recent recruit or an agent whose face had not been put on file in the West, but I doubted it because if the man were of any importance Yaskov would not have exposed his face to me. The chauffeur trotted around to open the limousine's back door and Yaskov emerged smiling, uncoiling himself joint by joint, a very tall lean handsome figure in Savile Row pinstripes, a Homburg tipped askew across his silver hair. No baggy Moscow serge for him.

His pale intense blue eyes, illuminated from within, were at once the shrewdest and kindest eyes I'd ever known and I had always attributed part of his success to those extraordinary eyes: I

suspected they had inspired more candor from his victims than had all the drugs and torture apparatus in the Arbat and Lubianka. Yaskov could charm the Sphinx out of its secrets.

As always he carried a cane. He owned an extensive collection of them. This one was a malacca, suitably gnarled and gleaming. The excuse was an old leg injury of some kind, but he walked as gracefully as an athlete and the cane was a prop, an affectation and, if necessary, a weapon.

He transferred it to his left hand and gave me his quick firm handshake. "Such a pleasure to see you again. When was our last meeting, do you recall?"

"Paris, 'seventy-four. When we were all chasing Kendig." He remembered it as well as I did but it was a harmless amenity and we both smiled. I said, "Why don't we take my car?"—drawling it with grave insouciance: I didn't want the chauffeur around.

"Why not indeed," Yaskov said carelessly. He made a vague sign to the gray-uniformed man, instructing him to wait by the limo, and followed me to my hired Volvo.

We drove out of town along a country road that curled gently through the forest. I made a right here, a left there. After twenty minutes—small talk between us—I pulled onto the verge and we walked across a carpet of pine needles to the edge of a crystal blue lake. Central Finland has thousands of such lakes, each as postcard-beautiful as the next; with a suitable net you can scoop up your supper from the bottom—fresh-water crayfish.

There was a log, strategically placed, and I sat down on one end of it. "I'm not bugged."

"Nor am I. Shall we go through the wretched tedium of searching each other?"

"We're both a bit long in the tooth for that kind of nonsense."

"I agree."

We trusted each other to that extent mainly because we were such fossils. We antedated the computer boys with their electronic gadgetry; we were the last of the tool-making men: we'd had to polish our wits rather than our mathematical aptitudes. In our decrepitude we still preferred to walk without the crutches of microphones, long lenses, and calculator-ciphers. To use those would have been a confession of weakness.

He said, "You seem heavier than you were."

"Maybe. I rarely weigh myself."

"Don't they have physical requirements in Rice's section?"

"For everybody but me." I said it with a measure of pride and he picked it up; his warm eyes laughed at me.

Then he said, "I too. You know I have a serious heart condition."

"Yes, I know that."

"I'd have been astonished if you didn't. It is a secret only from some of my own superiors." He laughed again, silently, and settled on the log next to me, prodding the earth with his cane.

I studied the toes of his polished cordovan shoes. "This is a bit dicey, Mikhail. You may have guessed why I've been posted here."

"May I assume the Company wishes me out of the Finns' hair?"

"You may."

"Well then." He smiled gently.

I said, "You've got a villa on the Black Sea, I hear."

"For my retirement."

"Nice place?"

"One of the largest of them. Magnificent view. Every room is wired with quadraphonic speakers for my collection of concert recordings. It's quite an imposing place. It belonged to a Romanov."

"It's a wonder to me how your bourgeois conceits haven't got you in trouble with your superiors in the classless state."

"A man is rewarded for his worth, I suppose."

"You should have been born to an aristocracy."

"I was. My father was a duke."

"Oh, yes. I'd forgotten." I hadn't forgotten, of course; I was simply endeavoring to prime the pump.

On the far side of the lake a rowboat appeared from an inlet and proceeded slowly right to left, a young couple laughing. I heard the faint slap of the oars. I said, "I hope you'll be able to enjoy the villa."

"Why shouldn't I, Charlie?"

"You might die in harness."

He chuckled avuncularly.

I said, "It would be a waste of all those quadraphonic speakers."

"I've often thought it would," he agreed with grave humor.

"I don't have a villa," I said.

"No. I suppose you don't."

"I've got nothing squirreled away. I spend everything I earn. I have four-star tastes. If they retired me right now, I'd be out in the street with a tin cup."

"What, no pension?"

"Sure. Enough to live on if you can survive in a mobile home in Florida."

"Of course that wouldn't do." He squinted at me suspiciously. "Are you asking me for money? Is that it? Are you proposing to sell out?"

"I guess not."

"I'm relieved. I would accept your defection, of course, but I wouldn't enjoy it. I prefer to see my judgments vindicated—I've always respected you. It would be an awful blow if you were to disappoint me. In any case," and he smiled beautifully, "I wouldn't have believed it for a moment."

"The trouble with Charlie Dark," I said, "I have champagne tastes and a beer income. I'm way past retirement age. I can't fend them off forever. I'm older than you are, you know—"

"Only by a year or two."

"—and they're eager to put me out to pasture. I'm an eyesore. My presence embarrasses them. They think we all should look like Robert Redford."

"How boring that would be."

I said, "This time they're offering me an inducement. A whopping bonus if I pull this last job off."

"Am I to be your last job?"

"Charlie's last case. A fitting climax to a brilliant career."

He laughed. "How much am I worth, then?"

"If I told you it would only inflate your conceit even more. Let's just say I'll be able to put up at Brown's and the Ritz for the rest of my life if I take a notion to."

"I don't believe very much of this, Charlie."

"That's too bad. I was hoping you would. It would have made this easier for both of us."

I took the pistol out of my pocket.

Yaskov regarded it without fear. One side of his lip bent upward and his eyebrow lifted. Across the lake the young couple in the rowboat had disappeared past a forested tongue of land; we were alone in the world.

I said, "It's only a twenty-five caliber and I don't know much about these things, but at this range it hardly matters. With your heart condition your system won't withstand the shock."

"It's a tiresome bluff, Charlie."

"That's the problem, don't you see? I don't want to shoot you. But you're not going to leave me any choice. I can't think of any

way short of shooting you to convince you that I'm not bluffing."

He poked at the pine needles with his cane. I gave him a look. "Can you think of any?"

"Not offhand." He gestured toward my pistol with the head of the malacca. "You'd better go ahead."

"We've got plenty of time. Maybe if we put our heads together we can think of an alternative."

"I doubt it. You're quite right, Charlie—I don't believe you'll do it. I believe it's an empty threat."

I studied the pistol, an unfamiliar object in my hand. "At least I know where the safety catch is. I think of this thing as a nuclear arsenal—a deterrent force. If you ever actually have to use it, it's too late."

"Yes, quite."

"But that doesn't make it impotent. The nukes are real, you know. This thing's loaded."

"I'm sure it is. But a loaded gun is no danger to anyone until there's a finger willing to pull the trigger."

I said, "It's a fascinating dilemma. I guess it comes down to a comparison of relative values. Which is more important to you—your life or your self-respect? Which is more important to me—the conceit of never resorting to violence or the promise of luxury for the rest of my life?"

"It's no good, Charlie. You'll have to kill me. There's no alternative at all. Look here, suppose I agreed to leave Finland and never return. Would that satisfy you?"

"Yes."

He said, "It would be easy for me to agree to that. Here: I promise you I'll leave Finland tomorrow and never return. How's that?"

"Fine. We can go now." I smiled but didn't stir.

"You see it's no good. I have only to break my word. My people would begin the hunt for you immediately. And it would be you, not I, who would end with a bullet in him."

"Ah, but if you kill me, then they'll send the whole Langley Agency after you and they won't sleep until they've nailed you. They've got their pride too, you know. No, Mikhail, you can't do it that way."

"Not to be terribly rude, old boy, but I really doubt they'd care that much. They're trying to get rid of you anyway. I might be doing them a favor." He spread his hands to the sides, the cane

against one palm. "Charlie. it's no good, that's all. You've never killed a man in cold blood. In fact, you've never killed a man at all, have you?"

"No. But obviously I'm not a pacifist or I'd be in some other line of work. I believe in protecting oneself and one's interests."

The rowboat reappeared, heading home. I put the gun away in my pocket to hide its telltale gleam from the young lovers, but I kept my hand on it and kept the muzzle pointed in Mikhail's direction. I said, "Your running dogs aren't good enough to sniff me out. You know that. While they were looking for me I'd be looking for you. Sooner or later I'd reach you. You know as well as I do that there's no way on earth to prevent a determined adversary from killing a man."

"There's one. Kill the adversary first. Unlike you I have no compunctions about that."

"Thing is, Mikhail, right now I'm the one with the gun. There's also the fact that I'm only a replaceable component. If I'm taken out they'll just send someone else to finish the job."

"Joe Cutter, no doubt?"

"Probably. And Joe isn't as peaceable as I am."

"On the other hand he's not quite as good as you are, Charlie. I could best him. I'm not sure I could best you—not if you were actually determined to kill me."

"And the next one after him, and the next after that?"

"Oh, they'd grow weary of it; they'd cut their losses."

"If nothing else, I think your heart wouldn't stand the strain."

The smile drifted from his gaunt handsome face; he regarded me gloomily. "Do you know what I'm thinking about?"

"I guess so. You're thinking about the comforts of those quadraphonic rooms and the untidiness of trying to operate in a country where the enemy superpower wants you out. You're thinking I'm never going to give you any peace. You're thinking how you like me as much as I like you, and you don't want to kill me any more than I want to kill you. You're thinking there's got to be a way out of this impasse."

"Quite."

The rowboat was gone again. I heard the lazy buzz of a light plane in the distance. Yaskov drew doodles in the earth with his cane.

I said, "You can leave any time you want. You write your own ticket. You volunteered for this post, I imagine, and you can vol-

unteer out. No loss of face. The climate doesn't agree with your heart condition."

He smiled again, shaking his head, and I took the pistol out of my pocket. "I want that bonus. I want it a lot, Mikhail. It's my last chance at it."

He only brooded at me, shaking his head a bit, and I lifted the pistol. I aimed it just past his face. I said, "If I pull the trigger it won't hit you. You'll get a powder burn maybe. The first time I shoot you'll flinch but you'll sit there and smile bravely. The second time my hand will start to tremble because I'm not used to this kind of thing. I'll get nervous and that'll make you get nervous. I'll shoot again and you'll have a harder time hanging onto that cute defiant smile. And so on until your heart can't stand it any more. When they find your body, of course they'll do an autopsy and they'll find out you died from a heart attack. My conscience will be a bit stained but I'll live with it. *I want that bonus.*"

He sighed, studying my face with an impassive scrutiny; after a long time he made up his mind. "Then I suppose you shall get it," he said, and I knew I'd won.

Yaskov left Finland at the end of the week and I returned to Virginia and other assignments. As I said, these events took place several years ago. Recently I had a call from an acquaintance in the Soviet trade delegation in Washington and I met her for drinks at a bar in Georgetown.

She said, "Comrade Yaskov sends his regards."

"Tell Mikhail Aleksandrovitch I hope he's enjoying his villa."

"He's dying, Mr. Dark."

"I'm very sorry."

"I'm instructed to ask you a question in his behalf."

"I know the question. Tell him the answer is no—I was not bluffing."

I thought of it as a last gift from me to Mikhail. In truth the whole play had been a bluff; I would not have killed him under any circumstances. I lied to him at the end because it would have been churlish and petty to puncture his self-esteem on his death-bed. Far better to let him die believing he had sized me up correctly. It meant he would think less of me, for compromising my principles, but I guessed I could live with that. It was a small enough price to pay. You see, I really did like him.

Still, I suspect he may have had the last laugh. It has been several months since the lady and I had drinks in Georgetown. To the best of my knowledge Yaskov is still very much alive; now and then an evidence of his fine hand shows up in one operation or another. I suspect he's still pulling strings from his Black Sea villa—directing operations from his concert-hall surroundings.

It leads me to believe he was simply growing tired of field work, tired of pulling inept Soviet colonels' chestnuts out of fires, tired of living in dilapidated embassies with enemies breathing down his collar. He was looking for an excuse to return home and I gave him an excellent one.

As the years go by I become increasingly uncertain as to which of us was the real winner.

"Q"

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H8J003

What can we tell you? A preposterous story—but you won't be able to put it down . . .

MAY THE WORST MAN WIN

by CAROL CAIL

I guess it began as a joke, but pretty soon the three of us were dead-serious about founding an evil cult. Jerkwater, Indiana, which is the epithet we gave our town, population 10,361, hardly seems a likely place for a Satan-worshiping sect, but that's exactly why we wanted it. We were middle-aged, successful, and respected, routinely plagued by tax returns, crabgrass, and small appliance breakdowns, limited to escapes via TV sports and ping-pong in a basement, or, if we were lucky, a stag party under the guise of a "poker night." In other words, we were bored out of our skulls.

Gillian Court is in a ten-year-old subdivision on the north side of town. When you turn off the through street into the court, Max Lynn's split-level is on the right, my ranch-style is on the left, and Dave Herrington's colonial is on the swing-around straight ahead.

Or, to put it another way, Max's place is the one that smells of antiseptic, Dave's of ammonia, and mine of TV dinners.

Max's wife is an invalid or a hypochondriac, depending on whether you're talking to a friend of the bride or of the groom. Actually this marriage was consummated twelve years ago for the first and virtually the last time, and it's been one continual headache for both of them ever since. It goes without saying there are no children to bless or otherwise affect the situation, and Max has to vent his love on his work. Consequently, he's a dentist with a terrific bedside manner.

At the other extreme is Dave's wife. The best way to describe her is to conjugate her; she is pregnant today, she was pregnant last year, and she will be pregnant next year. They have nine so far, and there is a bird, reptile, or animal for every 1.5 children.

© 1978 by Carol Cail.

Dave never has a hard day at the office, that cool, hushed, shagged, and paneled accounting office; but, oh, those psychedelic nights and weekends at home. Dave doesn't complain. He does find it necessary to be out of town on business quite a bit.

As for my wife and family, Nancy is your regular garden-club variety mate-going-on-matron. When she isn't doing good for someone or something worthy, she's at the beauty parlor being shored up herself. Our only child, Allen, Junior, is away at college, learning how to letter protest signs. He was the reason we got married in the first place, and the older he gets, the less reason I can see in the whole ritual of wedding to give a child a name. I'd just as soon not have mine associated with him at this point. And name is especially important if your grandfather founded a business and your father entrusted it on to you. Winkman's supermarket, in my case.

So there we were, three unhappy men. To show you how desperate we'd become, the highlights of our day were the five-minute car pool downtown mornings and return trip evenings. Then was our show and tell—dirty jokes, girlie magazines, and any topic discussible in plain Anglo-Saxon. The topic the last week of October, with Halloween lending the proper atmosphere, was devil worship.

None of us knew much about it. I had read an article in a newsmagazine about cults, mostly in California, with churches, preachers, sacraments and all, only the godhead was Satan. Max and Dave had seen an in-depth report on the evening news about self-proclaimed warlocks, also in California, and pretty soon we were all confused about whether you had to believe in witchcraft to join a devil cult. Actually we weren't interested in getting the facts straight. What interested us were the possibilities inherent in any organization dedicated to the preservation of sin. Visions of nubile, unclad ladies draped over altars danced in our heads. The word "orgy" came up a lot.

It was natural progression from talking about cults in general to discussing the particulars of a cult we'd organize if we had the inclination. And we *were* particular, right down to deciding that meetings would be every Tuesday night in my basement because that's my wife's save-our-endangered-insects night.

Nobody ever said, "Let's do it." Words like "if" and "could" just disappeared, and we were saying things like, "We'll need a gross of dripless candles."

Our first meeting was the first Tuesday in November. It was a perfectly staid planning-committee meeting for the resolving of matters we hadn't been able to cover in our regular five minutes twice a day six days a week. Questions like how to launch our membership drive. And, first things first, how to select our leader.

All three of us wanted the honor, so there was no use voting on it. We agreed that some kind of test should be devised giving each of us an equal chance to prove himself the most worthy, something our future devoted followers could look up to as awesome evidence of the evilness of their head man.

We decided we'd each break one of the ten commandments.

To keep it fair, we cut up a sheet of typing paper, wrote one commandment on each strip, and shook them up in a brown-paper bag. Of course, we didn't use all the commandments. We left out several that we were already breaking, the ones about having no other gods and keeping the sabbath and so on.

Still, in the interest of impartiality, we drew cards from a poker deck to see who'd draw from the commandment bag first, second, and third. We further agreed that the order of drawing commandments would also be the order for breaking them, so when Max got a deuce, I a seven, and Dave a ten, we knew that next Tuesday Dave would have to report on the commandment he'd broken, two Tuesdays from tonight would be my turn to report, and Max would have the last, the third, Tuesday.

Dave set a precedent by looking at the piece of paper he'd pulled out, tucking it into his shirt pocket, and refusing to say which one he had. So Max and I kept ours secret, too. When I read mine, it was hard to keep a poker face because, to mix the card-game metaphors, I'd taken the trump: "Thou shalt not kill." I knew I was a shoo-in.

During the next six days Max and I kidded Dave about his assignment, wanting to know if he'd completed it yet, but he wouldn't give us any hints.

Meanwhile, I was planning my own crime. First I thought of all the people I'd like to murder. But that wouldn't do, realistically, because I wanted to get away scot-free, and the way to be sure of that was to kill an absolute stranger. There must be no motive, not even acquaintance, to tie me in with the victim. I thought through every detail right down to how I'd prove to Dave and Max on my Tuesday that I was a murderer. Wouldn't they be green with envy!

The morning of Dave's Tuesday he phoned to say he wouldn't be riding downtown with us; he didn't feel very well, but he'd be reporting at the meeting, not to worry.

When I got home from work, Nancy was already off doing her angel-of-mercy thing somewhere. The note said, "Forgive me for leaving you like this," and as the TV dinner scorching the oven was chicken for the third night straight, there was much to forgive. I made myself a peanut-butter sandwich and went to plump up pillows in the basement rec room, impatient for the eight o'clock witching hour.

Max arrived first, 20 minutes early. The hour hand crept along till it was on six, and we couldn't stand it any longer, and I called Dave's number. We knew he'd say he was too sick, and maybe he was, and maybe he just hadn't had the nerve to break his commandment. One of his kids answered. Whenever you phone Dave, it sounds like there's an excited basketball audience in his house. After several top-of-the-lungs questions and answers, I understood the message to be that Dave was not at home, but he had left a letter for me in my rear screen door.

The letter, written on the back of a Tidy-Didy statement, read: "Lucky Dave drew the fun commandment. Two guesses who the lady is. I'm dropping out of the contest because I'm not coming back. When my wife notices I'm not around, in a month or so, tell her I went out of my mind trying to not go out of my mind." On the bottom was stapled the strip of paper labeled: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Of course, it was Nancy; no one in or out of his right mind would want Max's walking pharmacy. After the initial surprise—not shock, anger, or sorrow, just surprise—I had to hand it to Dave. He'd made the most of the weak assignment he'd drawn. Not just any woman, but the wife of a close friend and competitor. I was sure it wouldn't have beaten my upcoming performance, but, still, it was a very good try.

At first it was hard to picture good old Nancy agreeing to such a step. Obviously Dave had appealed to her generous nature. "Help me escape from my past. Stop me before I overpopulate again," or something like that.

After a couple rounds of beer Max went home. His glumness was only natural. Dave had partially released me as well as himself from our humdrum, but Max's situation remained unchanged.

So now it was my turn.

There was nothing to be done till Monday, six days away, except think over the plan till it was perfect in every detail.

Dave's wife phoned Wednesday evening to ask if I knew why he hadn't come home lately. I told her, as gently as any man could shouting like that, that he had deserted her, and she'd better start filing divorce papers. She answered, "Thank you very much," as if she meant it, so I'm not sure whether she heard me or not.

Later that night a quiet voice came through the phone line asking after Nancy. Mrs. Hightower, president of the insect population-saving group. It was so unlike Dear Nancy to miss a meeting without notifying someone to take her parliamentary place. One hopes the sweet girl is not ill?

I reassured her that Nancy was fine but her great-aunt in Chicago, victim of a bee sting, was being buried in the morning.

Two evenings later another crony phoned to check up on Nancy's absence from the Bring Back Prohibition meeting, and I couldn't resist dispatching Auntie with cirrhosis of the liver this time.

So, amazingly, the community was still ignorant of our little scandal. Dave's wife didn't seem to know about Nancy's role, and Max wasn't one to gossip. I supposed that I'd eventually have to tell Nancy's comrades that their philanthropist had philandered. I mildly wondered if she'd come back, and whether I'd want her to. I did hope she'd stay away at least till my commandment was successfully pulverized.

Then Sunday night she telephoned. When I recognized her "Allen?", I visualized her down at the bus station needing a lift home. Then she said, "I'm long distance," and I felt relieved.

"Allen, I owe you an explanation. I'm sure you must have been worried, and I want you to know I'm all right. But—"

Her voice faded behind the static of a tissue coming between mouth and receiver. Then it revived a couple octaves higher.

"I'm not coming home."

This was followed by a lot of gagging and deep breathing.

"I'm happy you and Dave are hitting it off so well," I inserted politely.

"No, no. I'm not with Dave! That was only for—just temporary. But I can't come home after—how could I face everyone? My friends—the neighbors—"

Now if she had said, "How could I face my husband?" first, last,

or at all, I might have fallen off the fence on her side. But I waited, listening to her get her toll call's worth of nose blowing, and the next thing she was able to articulate was, "Would you please donate my wardrobe to Good Will?", and that sealed her fate.

"Of course, I understand your not wanting to be back here in the midst of the gossip. Let's try a separation, and if you decide on a divorce, you know where to reach me."

Then I gave in to cowardice and hung up on her.

Monday evening came. When I got home from work, I changed into the oldest, most nondescript suit, shirt, shoes, and topcoat I could assemble. I took the Volkswagen because there are more of them on a city street than there are Audis like my wife's.

It's a two-hour drive to the outskirts of Indianapolis, so it was eight o'clock when I turned into the shopping center and camouflaged the VW by parking it in the sea of vehicles. I walked to the first bus stop I could see and got on the first bus that came along.

I rode quite some time, looking for a promising street, but the route was one of good neighborhoods, and I got off before the driver could start wondering about me. The next bus I boarded went downtown, then turned west, and eventually the scenery began to meet my requirements. A row of neon beer signs, just what I was looking for, indicated my stop. As I swung down, I turned my collar up against the wind and any would-be witnesses, and started sauntering past the taverns.

The temperature was close to freezing, yet the sidewalk provided *Lebensraum* for a couple of dozen souls, stupefied by trouble and drink. They clotted doorways, shuffled, shivered, leaned, squatted, coughed, cursed, and spat. They watched my passing, not with interest, but as any moving object attracts the eye. I could murder any one of these and he wouldn't be missed, or, if missed, not mourned. No one would breathe down the necks of the police demanding justice.

Halfway up the block, the mouth of an alley gaped. I looked into it, and the latrine stench told me I could enter without arousing any curiosity. It was narrow, clogged with overspilling trash cans, and surprisingly well lit. It bisected its block straight through, but there were numerous little cul-de-sacs leading off from it, all as filthy and cluttered as the artery itself.

I chose my niche with care. It ended in a wooden door padlocked on the outside, protected from all overviews by a maze of

fire escape, and protected from ground level view by the inevitable trash pile. A stack of cardboard cartons yielded twine, and I was ready.

I walked back to the entrance of the alley and stood studying the field again. I was sure I'd be strong enough to take on any of them, but a smaller man would make my job easier. The hard part, though, would be tricking him into the cul-de-sac, and so I found him, not by size, but by the vacancy in his face.

He was weaving along the curb, watching his feet as if he expected them to go off on their own. He wasn't wearing a coat, and his frayed suit was summer weight even new. A sweat-stained baseball cap and dirty sneakers, no socks, completed his attire. He seemed to be reciting to himself, but, when I got closer, he was working his mouth soundlessly, like a TV with technical sound difficulties. His puffy, blotched face could have been 30 or 60. When I spoke to him, he stared with mucused eyes. Then a reflexive smile twisted his lips, as if he understood me—I'd been afraid he wouldn't.

I turned toward the alley, but he remained, swaying and grinning. So I took him gently by the arm and repeated, "Come share my bottle. I don't like to drink alone." And this time I pulled aside my coat enough so that he could glimpse the flask I'd brought from home.

He let me guide him to the alley, into it. We picked our way slowly. He stumbled and leaned against me, but his feet kept working. I glanced back a couple times. We were of no interest to anyone.

I never heard his voice. When we arrived at the scene of the imminent crime, I helped him slide to a sitting position, his back against the cartons. I would have given him the drink he expected, a last meal of sorts, but I couldn't risk the flask breaking and leaving my fingerprints for some well-trained detective.

And so as soon as I let go of him, I grabbed the twine, threw it around his head, and twisted it in front, high under his chin, till it wouldn't twist any tighter. Then I waited, holding on as if my life depended on it, watching him struggle and turn purple and go limp. I counted off two more minutes before releasing my grip.

I tossed the twine back into the carton. I slipped my camping knife out of my pants pocket. This was the last step. I'd killed, and now I needed a token of my sin. My grocery butcher training came in handy as I lopped the little finger from his left hand and

pickled it in the flask. The knife came clean on the derelict's shirt tail. I stood back, breathing hard, and satisfied none of me was left behind, walked fast the other way of the alley, out onto a new street.

It was as uninviting as the other—pool hall, greasy smelling restaurant, laundry, and variety stores. I went east till I came to a bus stop. It was a shorter wait than I'd hoped for, maybe five minutes. The bus headed downtown, and I got out at the capitol building where taxis were plentiful. At 9:18 one deposited me at the shopping plaza. There were still enough cars around so that I had to hunt for the VW.

Tuesdays are usually quiet at the supermarket; I was able to escape to the storeroom with the afternoon edition and look for the story. It wasn't front page, but it rated a respectable quarter column on page four. The tramp was Melvin Hill, age 46, residence unknown. He'd been discovered by police on a routine patrol drive through the alley at 9:30 Monday night. No motive, no witnesses, no clues; puzzlement over the severed finger. I could hardly wait to tell Max.

He didn't turn a hair. We sat at the bar in my basement, the finger swaddled in gauze lying before us, and he looked from it to me with the same dispassion he'd bestow on a tooth he'd just extracted.

"Do you concede, Max, old buddy?"

He shook his head and grunted. "It'll be a tough act to follow."

We drank some beer and made a stab at small talk, but I could see his mind's gears were spinning on the one subject: what a coup I'd pulled, and how it was his turn now, and he'd have to play the good sport.

He went home at ten. Before I readied for bed, I committed my piece of Melvin Hill to the trash compactor. The machine growled its required number of seconds and shut off. It occurred to me that a whole body might go such a route, if need be.

At seven o'clock the next morning the doorbell rang. I was shaving, and I took my time finishing the last few strokes, expecting it to be the milkman wondering why we weren't putting out our empties, or some terrible problem like that.

It was two uniformed policemen.

"Come in, Ed," I said overheartily to the older, chubbier one. "What's on your mind so early in the morning?"

"Would you please answer a few questions, Allen?" he said,

sweeping off his cap and glancing casually around the living room.

"Of course. What about?"

"Well, actually, there's been some talk. That is, we're wondering if you could tell us about the missus. She hasn't been home for a while, is that right?"

My mind breathed a big sigh of relief. The old biddies had been comparing notes and were convinced my lies boded no good for their Nancy.

"That's right, Ed. I haven't wanted to tell the truth about it, and I think you can appreciate why when you hear. Fact is, she's left me. Ran off with another man."

Ed looked pained, scratched his head, hunched his shoulders, shuffled his feet, and managed to ask, "Who is the man, do you mind?"

"I believe it was Dave Herrington," I said helpfully.

Ed stared disbelievingly. He glanced around the room again.

"You know where she is now?"

"I'm afraid I don't. She phoned me Sunday, but she didn't say where she was."

"Well, look, Allen. We've had a complaint, a pretty serious charge against you, and so's we can prove there's nothing in it, I wonder if you'd let us just take a look around your house here. We brought a search warrant to make it all legal."

"Yes, of course," I responded generously. "But it will have to be quick, because I'm due at the market in a few minutes."

"Well, now why don't you just let us lock up the place when we're through here, and you just go on. I believe that's your ride now," he added as Max's horn signaled an exit from his garage.

"I don't like to go off and leave you—"

"Why, Allen, think nothing of it. We'll leave everything just the way we find it. If anything turns up missing, you can call the police." He chuckled mirthlessly.

So I left them, worried, but not too worried. They would probably make a cursory examination of the house, report my story to the concerned ladies, and that would be the end of it.

That's what I assured myself right up to the time I borrowed the assistant manager's car to "go home for lunch" and found a brand-new, sickeningly empty bag in the trash compactor. I was drinking coffee and running through "attorneys" in the yellow pages when the patrol car arrived.

The next days were a nightmare. On top of the legal hocus-pocus, Nancy swooped home, her shame forgotten in the excitement of this once-in-a-lifetime role of rallying round her husband. My lawyer was trying to sell me an insanity plea. Even if I'd confided my motive for killing Melvin Hill, he'd have pushed the insanity plea.

It was Tuesday when Max visited me, *his* Tuesday. We eyed each other through the screen, embarrassed, as if we were at a funeral and couldn't think of an appropriate eulogy.

"I guess you'll have to bring in all the new membership by yourself," I joked from under a stiff upper lip.

"Yes, I'll do that," he intoned.

"You don't mean you went through with it! You broke your commandment, too?"

"Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely."

"Go on, tell me," I said, delighted with the diversion.

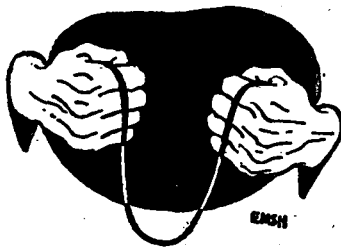
"I'm surprised you haven't figured it out." He leaned toward me and enunciated slowly, "I exposed you to the police."

When I didn't react, he fished a crumpled, familiar-looking slip out of his shirt pocket, and smoothed it on the table. The words looked fuzzy through the mesh. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

"*False!*" I exclaimed. "It's 'Thou shalt not bear *false* witness!'"

"That's right, Allen. I told them you had murdered your wife."

And when he smiled, the light shining along his jaw showed me the hint of a goatee he'd begun to grow for the leader's job.



a NEW short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

One of Robert Frost's characters has said, "Good fences make good neighbors." Do good binoculars make good neighbors? Sometimes they do . . .

THE LADY OF THE DARK GLASSES

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Today I saved a life.

Most men have daydreams left over from boyhood, in which they star as the knight errant on the white charger. Having given the charger a road test, I can report that it is not all it's cracked up to be. Granted, I saved Lissa, but from what? The snag about preventing a murder instead of solving it is that one never knows quite where one stands . . .

Steve and Lissa Bristol—not their true names, for reasons which will become self-evident—moved in next door about three years ago.

Physically, they were as strong a contrast as Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello.

Steve, balding and florid, had been an athlete at college and still looked impressive at any distance too great to detect flab from muscle. Lissa put one in mind of the French singer, Edith Piaf. No real resemblance, apart from both women being tiny—but Lissa had that elusive quality of gaiety fueled by either sadness or frustration. Her bird's-nest hair was a fiery red, making her face look chalky.

Our previous neighbors had been sour oldsters, deeply into noise abatement and complaining on the slightest pretext. Steve

© 1978 by Jeffry Scott.

Bristol, who had sold a chain of hardware stores to sample early retirement, turned out to be very good at lending garden tools and not making a fuss over anything.

So it was natural that the four of us should spend a lot of time together. Maeve, my wife, took to Lissa. Steve wasn't really my cup of tea—apart from engineering manuals, he never opened a book, and his taste in music soared all the way to military bands; but there was no harm in him, and Lissa was sweet. Though slightly trying company, because she always seemed to be on wires.

Steve, incidentally, didn't drink. He wasn't a bore about it, but at parties and get-togethers, he refused to take anything harder than a straight cola soft drink. "Steve's special" became a bit of a family joke; Maeve used to decorate his tumbler with ice, lemon, and fruit salad so that it looked like one of those horribly costly tourist cocktails.

Until the unpleasantness occurred, our two houses were virtually extensions of each other, what with the gate in the boundary hedge.

That was how I came across the newspaper clippings.

It was a blazing summer afternoon and we were playing desultory Monopoly under a giant umbrella on the Bristols' lawn, when I wandered indoors to fetch us all a pitcher of iced lemonade. En route I spotted a book on the shelf beside the fireplace in the library.

I'd been hunting that out-of-print biography of the Victorian engineer, Brunel, for years. It was just the thing Steve *would* have acquired, come to think of it.

Hooking it out—it was a tight fit—the volume's weight took me unawares. It fell and the newspaper clippings sprayed out on the carpet. And after all that, it wasn't the Brunel book but an 1890s textbook on flower arrangements in the Brunel dust jacket. How it got there . . . anyway I put the clippings back inside the front cover, replaced the book, and went on to the kitchen. I did wonder, fleetingly, why anyone should bother to keep clippings on a rather morbid subject; but good-natured heckling and claims of imminent death from thirst were floating in from the garden, and the query in my mind evaporated long before I reached the fridge.

Not being good at nuances, it took me months to start feeling what my dear old grandmama used to refer to, with capital let-

ters, as An Atmosphere. This Atmosphere had descended over Numbers 24 and 26 Sunride Drive.

Maeve looked at me like a cat—the blank, sequin stare shared by females and felines—when I suggested as much. So something *was* up. She and Steve or Lissa and she, or some permutation of the three were at odds. The obvious explanation was that Steve had made a pass at my child bride—except that he wasn't the type, and in any case Maeve always reported passes, taking them as inelegant compliments.

Mysteries, *mysteriés*, possibly imaginary ones, as Maeve insisted pinkly. White lies, oddly enough, tend to turn her red.

Lissa popped in one evening while I was failing to fix the spin-drier. I mumbled at her from the depths of the blasted machine and was vaguely aware of her and my wife adjourning upstairs and—thankfully—not hanging around to give me advice. Back-seat drivers are pure bliss compared to back-seat mechanics.

At eleven P.M. I tightened the last nut, switched on, and was rewarded with a strong smell of toasting circuitry and a spin-drier delivering clothes markedly damper than when they'd been put in. A breakthrough, but of dubious value. I fled the utility room and found Maeve on her own again, in the kitchen.

"Swine," she muttered. I hadn't even broken the news of her new spin-wetter, either. And swearing is not my child bride's speed; I blinked.

"Not you," Maeve said crossly. "I was thinking aloud." Then she went off at a tangent.

"Have you noticed the way Lissa vanishes for days at a time? Oh, she's at home all right, but never shows her face. I thought it was just moodiness. Another thing—every so often she takes to wearing sunglasses everywhere, even indoors."

"Try English, darling. I'm not with the language you're using."

Maeve made a disgusted noise and passed me the bedtime hot chocolate. Quite a lot of it stayed in the mug when she banged it down, but they were only old jeans, anyway.

Glaring at me, she said, "It's your good friend Steve—he knocks Lissa about. And worse."

"Come on . . . him? Steve?" I didn't believe it for all of two seconds. It was like being told that our dog Pluto has rabies. Steve was Steve, part of the local scenery.

Then I did believe it. Hindsight struck like lightning. I was remembering the Bristols' last-but-one party, and Steve teasing

Lissa. "Accident prone, my wife," he had jeered fondly. Hadn't it been fondly? "Forever walking into doors or falling over her own feet."

False note. Lissa simply wasn't clumsy: a birdlike little thing, fluttery but neat, and not a stumbler and barger-into objects. Further, there was the matter of her reaction to Steve's claim. Confusion, a hand faltering to the graze on her forehead. I'd been idly surprised at the time and now surprise turned into suspicion.

Maeve read my expression. "Exactly. Dark glasses to hide a black eye. Hiding indoors until a cut heals enough to be covered with makeup. Plus Steve's constant harping on her 'accidents.' I wondered why he kept on about that—wasn't even funny, and it upset Lissa."

I wasn't listening. You had to know them to understand why my reaction was disgust and anger in equal measure. Lissa, that fragile little dot of a thing, up against Steve with his meaty hands and hulking, beached-whale movements.

"But *why*?"

Maeve delivered the second shock of the night. "He drinks. Don't go shaking your head! The on-the-wagon bit is for our benefit. Anyway, Steve daren't take a drink in public. He can't stop, and he gets nasty. To put it mildly."

She was very pale. "The man's—ugh—I guess the word is sadist."

It was a lot to take in and accept at one sitting. I'm no male chauvinist, but human nature made me grope for some sort of balancing argument. "You mean Lissa's told you all this?"

My child bride snorted contempt. "Oh, Bill! I could tell something was wrong, it's been bothering me for months. No, she hasn't told me. Not in so many words. Until tonight."

Maeve started stirring her chocolate, concentrating on the little brown whirlpool. "If you're right-handed, it's hard to put a decent bandage on your right hand. Lissa came round earlier, wearing a bandage. We were cutting out a dress, upstairs, and the bandage slipped."

She almost retched. "Bill, that poor woman's hand was *raw*. Okay, I'm exaggerating. But it was awful—three, four circular burns. Cigarette burns. I was so startled and upset that—well, Lissa just cracked and it all poured out, what happens when Steve goes on his private, personal benders."

To be honest, along with compassion for Lissa and dislike for

Steve, I was experiencing a shameful wave of irritation and embarrassment. It wasn't like cruelty to children. One felt called on to respond somehow, but Lissa was a grown woman. What the hell did one *do*?

"You do nothing," Maeve ordered, after the thought had been shared. "You're not supposed to know. Lissa made me promise not to tell anyone, she said she'd die of shame if it got out. That's why she won't divorce Steve."

"It's an impossible situation. We can't cut him dead and still be friendly with Lissa."

Maeve sipped her chocolate, pulling a face over it. "Lissa needs our friendship, Bill. So I suppose we have to live with it. But I wish we weren't stuck next door to them."

It was an ordeal, my first encounter with Steve, after that evening. I felt a sense of wonder, almost. I haven't led a sheltered life, by any means—grew up on a working-class street during hard times. But despite the poverty and squalor, wife-beaters were fairly rare and we'd never lived next to one.

What made Steve tick? It was as if I'd been set down beside one of those mythical animals—a centaur, a unicorn. This loud-laughing, flabby fellow in the creased tweeds was a perverted bully.

Maeve treated him with cool politeness, but then she'd been doing that ever since her suspicions had awakened, long before Lissa broke down. Steve hadn't noticed. I hardly knew how to act, and that did get through to him. In the weeks that followed, our two households drifted apart.

A doctor told me, years ago, that each day the human brain makes more connections than every telephone switchboard in the whole world.

In which case, the switchboard in my skull is manned by a number of gum-chewing, magazine-reading, gossiping operators. Connections get made, but the system is lengthy and haphazard.

This particular call was put in after watching the TV news. Maeve muttered, "I hope Steve's watching this, Bill. It might slow him down." And we went to bed.

I woke up at four A.M. for no discernible reason, heart pounding, head spinning, remembering the newspaper clippings spread out on the carpet. Two had fallen right side up so that I knew what they were about. I started to nudge Maeve and then I converted it

to a reassuring squeeze of her hip. But I couldn't get back to sleep, despite the soothing rhythm of her slumber.

Next morning I skipped the coffee break and located Portis, the firm's lawyer. "No," he said, after I'd outlined the hypothetical case, "a husband can't inherit his wife's estate after doing her in, even if it's manslaughter. Sorry, Bill, but Maeve's millions remain beyond your reach, if you polish her off with the breadknife." Legal men have a weird sense of humor, in my experience.

Portis had only confirmed what I'd thought to be the case. The information threw me for a while. It was galling not to be able to talk it through with Maeve. My garden began responding to attention, for I discovered that gardening helped theory-building, or vice versa.

The answer came while pruning the roses, and I could have kicked myself. Instead, I was so excited that I snipped a bit out of my thumb and had to pelt into the house for first aid. Maeve was displeased; gore, she informed me, was no better for the carpet than cigarette ash.

Luckily Maeve goes out to work. I took the following week off and set myself up in my son Julian's room upstairs, with its excellent view of the back of the house next door. My son used to be nuts about birdwatching, until his interest veered from feathered friends to the miniskirted brand of bird. His binoculars were still on the window sill.

Julian's in Africa now, helping to build dams and suchlike. It was strange, sitting among the four-year-old pop posters and football match programs, waiting for my theory to come true. Or not, of course. When it *did* start following the lines I had guessed at, it wasn't just strange but outright scary.

It was the flat-racing season, and each morning Steve would be setting out for some meeting or other—playing the horses was his big retirement hobby. After which I would walk toward the station, turn left instead of right, and sneak back to our house by the lane and back garden.

On the fourth morning, toward eleven o'clock, I saw Lissa and the man having a row. They were standing by the French windows, Lissa evidently pleading, the man patting her shoulder but shaking his head.

They went out of sight. An hour afterward I heard a car pulling away, out of view at the front of the house. The French windows opened and Lissa emerged. She walked across the patio, stepped

down onto the lawn, and stopped before a gnarled old apple tree.

What happened next made me cry out in sympathy, almost feeling the impact. I let the binoculars drop. Even knowing the motive for it, Lissa's action was outrageous, sick.

Her back had tensed, her arms had straightened behind her, fingers knotted—and *she smashed her face against the tree trunk.*

When a conjuring trick has been explained and you witness it another time, you see so much more . . .

I'd been knocking and ringing for a while before Lissa opened their front door, a wet flannel pressed to her face. *What an actress*, I thought. Shaken to find me on the doorstep, she used the off-guard instant without hesitation, converting her start into a timid glance back at the stairway.

"Oh . . . Bill," she whispered. "Come in, but be quiet. Steve's dozing upstairs and he's—well, in a bit of a bad mood." Then, having made sure that the damp cloth registered, she made a welcoming gesture dictating its removal—to show abrasions and spreading bruise. The cloth was clapped back into place immediately. She even managed to blush.

"You must get Steve on the stage," I commented, following her to the living room. "He's upstairs and also at Kempton Park races. Quite a trick, being in two places at once."

Lissa made no comment, but when she spoke, her voice was at the normal level. Eyes very bright over the cloth. "What d'you want, Bill? I didn't know you were home today."

"I've been at home all week. Watching for visitors here. You lead what they call an active social life, Lissa."

Tossing the cloth onto the coffee table, she looked at me.

Perhaps it was accidental that she leaned forward to push the cloth to the center of the table. The movement continued forward until she was sitting on the carpet with a hand on me. "Blackmail?" she queried. "But not for money, Billy. I've noticed the way you look at me."

I removed the hand. "Blackmail, in a way. I don't want you killing Steve. Drop the idea, and I won't tell him about your fancy man who must know this house better than Steve does."

Lissa moved back to sit cross-legged, showing a lot of leg, chin on her palm. "Steve won't believe you. Especially when I say you barged in here and molested me." The eyes were cold as well as bright. "Think what that would do to Maeve."

My breathing was shaky. "Yes. I thought of that. I've explained to her what I'm doing. She thinks I'm crazy. But she also knows that I wouldn't be coming here to attack you, Lissa."

She smiled nastily. "Good for you and Maeve, but it doesn't alter the fact that Steve will accept my version and take my side. It's what they call stalemate." Belatedly she went on, "And this nonsense about killing Steve—whatever you're smoking these days, I'd like some of it."

"It's simple, luv. The knocks and grazes and burns and so forth—not from Steve. You've been doing it. I've just watched you provide some more wife-battering evidence, remember. Letting Maeve force it out of you instead of volunteering the information, that was brilliantly done."

Lissa was shaking her head. "I can't see where the killing comes in, though."

"You haven't been building up this situation for years without a purpose. Those newspaper clippings hidden in a book Steve would never open—all cases of battered wives who turned on their husbands when it became unbearable or they were mad with fear—and got the court's sympathy and nominal sentences, or acquittals.

"There was just such a case on the TV news the other night. It reminded me of those clippings. It reminded me of you, Lissa."

She was very, very good; or rather, bad. Just sat there as if posing for a fairy-tale illustration of a pixie on a toadstool. "It's a lovely *idea*, Bill," she acknowledged judiciously. "Our old cliché friend, the perfect murder.

"But it wouldn't work. I'd need a motive. Steve's rich, but if I killed him, for whatever reason—even desperation, attacked once too often by a sadist—I wouldn't get his money."

"That worried me," I agreed. "Until I saw your lover. Reminded me of somebody, couldn't think who. Then the penny dropped. Just now, when you were winding him up to hit you, and he couldn't bring himself to do it. He's a younger version of Steve. Nephew, maybe? In line to inherit, no doubt, if you're not eligible. And you split the proceeds when the fuss dies down. Idyllic: much-abused widow finds understanding partner, and they sink slowly into the sunset—not to mention Steve's cash."

Lisa rose abruptly. "Fantasy," she remarked politely. "Depending on what you *claim* you saw me do, out in the garden, and some old Press cuttings that'll be burnt as soon as you leave. You can do *that* right now, incidentally."

A major effort of will stopped my jaw hitting my chest. She was right, of course. I'd come steaming in to tell her it was all up, and succeeded in tipping my hand. Fools, bloody fools, and amateur detectives, as Sir Winston Churchill almost said . . .

My hand strayed to the breast pocket of my shirt. Lissa tensed staring hard enough to burn a hole in the material. I swallowed with difficulty and managed to grin.

"That's right," I said. "Tape recorder, my love. I'm not *that* big a fool." I outlined the oblong with a fingertip. "Captured for posterity, and I've just got time to get round to the bank vault before it closes. The tape stays there. It's Steve's insurance policy, making sure he lives out a very long retirement."

She moved so fast and looked so crazy that I flinched. One hand pounced for my shirt pocket, the other hooked and slashed for the eyes. I shoved her away and retreated in a hurry, every inch the strong, dominating man.

"Will you tell him, are you going to tell Steve?" she screeched, that little pointed chin shiny with saliva.

"What's the point? The poor devil loves you. It would break his heart, not that you'd know anything about hearts."

Lissa called me a number of things, all obscene. "You don't have to live with the fat boring slob," she finished; though "slob" was not the epithet she used.

"Neither do you. Just pray that he's a healthy, long-lived slob who doesn't have an accident which isn't one hundred percent genuine. Else I play my little tape and you'll do your explaining to the police."

I beat the flung ashtray to the doorway by a microsecond, and its twin smashed against the front door as I yanked it shut behind me.

Just in case the rage had been another of her performances, and she was watching from behind a curtain, I set off toward the main road, as if heading for the bank, as threatened.

Safely out of sight around the corner, I unbuttoned my shirt pocket and removed the oblong object. Thank heaven there was one left, inside. It had been one hell of an encounter and I really needed a cigarette.

"Q"

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 504th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . the story of a sibling rivalry . . .

The author, Dorothy A. Collins, is "21 plus too much." She has published some humorous verse, collects miniature curios, and "pretends to have the upper hand with two arrogant cats." She has been national coordinator of A.G.V.A. (American Guild of Variety Artists) and a partner in a talent agency. (Story of the theater coming up?) . . .

FOUND ON THE COOKBOOK SHELF

by DOROTHY A. COLLINS

How I hate that woman.

I suppose it's abnormal to hate one's sister—and a twin, at that—but relatives are people, after all; and some people are likeable, some are unlikeable, and some are downright detestable.

Natalie is detestable.

I confronted her again tonight about the money. I made Boeuf Bourignon for dinner, one of her favorites. Get her in a mellow mood, soften her up, I thought. Ha! It made no difference at all, nothing ever does with that one.

"Sarah," she said with that long-suffering here-we-go-again air of hers (actually, she loves these set-tos because she wins every time), "Sarah, we've been over this again and again. Papa left all the money to me because he trusted my judgment and common sense. And I'm exercising my judgment and common sense in holding on to it for both of us. If I turned over any part of it to you, you'd go through it like a cat in a creamery."

Be calm, I told myself. I smiled carefully. "I may have been fey and feckless in my salad days, Natalie," I said, striving grimly for a light tone. "But that's all over and done with. I'm a mature woman now, perfectly capable of handling my own finances."

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"Nonsense," she said. "You're as silly and irresponsible at forty-seven as you were at seventeen. And there's always Mama's jewels, you know."

Mama's jewels have always been a sore point with her—she never could understand why Mama, bless her, had left them outright to me, any more than she can understand why I never sold them. As if I would! They're the only thing I have that I can truly call my own, besides which they're utterly gorgeous, and worth a fortune.

"Besides," she droned on, stuffing herself with Tarte aux Fraises, "you know I've offered time and again to set you up in your own apartment where you'd be independent and on your own, if that's what you're so mad for."

Leave Papa's house? (*Her house now, of course, damn her.*) I'll leave it feet first, and no other way, and well she knows it—which is why she keeps bringing it up.

And then she said, as she always does, "All this is academic, anyway, Sarah. You know I've always provided for you, and always will. Whatever you want, you have only to ask—"

"Why should I have to *ask*?" I shouted, and the whole thing ended in a shambles again, with me storming out of the room shaking with rage, and her sitting there with that phony rueful smile, enjoying it, enjoying it.

Tuesday, September 6

Stomach acting up again after that row with N. last night—went to see Dr. Martin. He gave me some new tranquilizers and a lot of palaver about cutting out rich food, learning to accept things, etc., etc. Tiresome old goat. One thing I *did* inherit along with Natalie is the vulnerable Winter stomach.

Saturday, September 10

I'm so furious I'm ill with it. Natalie went to the theater tonight with some of her fuddy-duddy friends and dragged home this so-called actor—a third-rate down-at-the-heel specimen if I ever saw one. Oh, he's handsome enough, I'll grant you—black wavy hair, deep blue Irish eyes, tall, well built, plenty of spurious charm. Calls himself Gerald Harrison. He was plainly impressed with our home—private brownstone, lavish furnishings. Natalie doesn't stint herself as far as surroundings are concerned, I'll give her that.

"Must take a staff to run this place," said Harrison, looking around appreciatively.

"Not at all," said Natalie, smiling at him. "We live very modestly. A gardener comes in once a week to tend our little backyard plot, and we have a cleaning woman in three times a week. And in between," she added coyly, "we're not above flicking a duster here and there." (We!) "And of course," she went on, simpering at me, "Sarah's a marvelous cook—she wouldn't tolerate anyone in her kitchen, would you, darling?"

I smiled stonily and didn't deign to reply.

And then—and *then*—she came out brightly with: "In fact, you must sample our haute cuisine, Gerald. Come to us for dinner tomorrow, why don't you? Sarah will fix one of her heavenly meals for us, won't you, sweetie?"

The gall, the unspeakable gall of the woman, assuming I'll wait on her and her stray cat like some servant at her bidding.

We'll see, we'll see. I'll think of something to even the score.

Saturday, September 24

Gerald's been coming here quite often these past two weeks, and they've had occasional sorties out on the town—mostly at Natalie's expense, I'd guess. Still, he's not a bad sort—I must say I don't mind cooking for him. He has a fine palate and tells me I'm a true artist, much to Natalie's annoyance. And he's unfailingly courteous to me—gallant, you might say. In fact, I've caught more than a gleam of interest in those indigo eyes from time to time.

Natalie's proprietary air is really insufferable.

Wednesday, September 28

Well, well! Gerry asked me to go with them to a new musical—was quite insistent, in fact. N. very much taken aback, I could see. I demurred prettily, but suggested they come back for some Quiche Lorraine after the show. N. said no, really, don't trouble, they'd stop at Mario's for a late supper. No chance, said G., not with Sarah's delectables awaiting us.

If looks could kill, I'd be cold as a carp right now.

Watch it, Natalie.

Friday, September 30

Oh, beautiful, beautiful! What a heavenly turn of events.

Natalie's down with the flu—Dr. Martin came over this afternoon and gave her some medication (placebos, I shouldn't wonder—I think he's getting rather sick of us) and told her on no account to get out of bed until her temperature was normal for one whole day. Which threw her into a terrible tizzy as she had a date with Gerry to go to some theatrical party, not that she could possibly have gone, all runny-nosed and bleary-eyed as she was.

So what was more natural than that I should take her place? Which I did, I can assure you, with bells on. I settled on my green chiffon, which goes well with my hair (a soft honey blonde, as opposed to Natalie's horrible mahogany tint, which she's pleased to call auburn). And, of course, Mama's emerald and diamond pendant, earrings, and bracelet.

I must say I looked resplendant, all fire and ice, literally ablaze! Gerry was stunned. "Are those things *real*?" he asked, awed. I assured him they were. And, of course, I had to give Natalie a good look, poor thing. I wafted into the sickroom on a cloud of Joy and smiled down at her.

"I hate to leave you alone like this, dear," I purred.

"Just get out and leave me alone," she shouted, hating me with her red-rimmed eyes.

Lovely evening, lovely people, lovely everything.

I'm seeing Ger again tomorrow.

Saturday, October 1

Well, everything is turning out better than I ever could have dreamed. I'm writing this in the kitchen, as usual—I keep my diary on the cookbook shelf labeled *Special Recipes*—and when N. pokes her head in, which she rarely does, I simply tell her I'm writing up some new recipe. So there's no possibility of her ever seeing this, which heaven forbid, considering what I'm about to write down, *have* to write down for the sheer joy of it.

I had dinner with Ger tonight and dropped my bombshell. Oh, I had it all carefully worked out, and I did it just right.

"Ger," I said over coffee, "about Natalie."

"Mmm?" he murmured, his blue gaze warm and intent.

"Well," I said hesitantly, "poor Natalie lives in a fantasy world." I took a sip of coffee and assumed a troubled expression. "I suppose she gave you the impression that she holds the purse strings, runs the house and all that?" I fingered the emerald pendant, watching his eyes travel there as if drawn by a magnet.

"Well, yes, I suppose she did," he said slowly. He looked confused, as well he might.

"All right, then—let her go on thinking that, Ger," I said earnestly. "I always have—it's much kinder, and what difference does it make, really? I don't mind at all if it makes her happy. Poor girl, it was a terrible shock to her when Papa died and left everything to me." I shook my head and sighed heavily.

Gerald reached over and squeezed my hand. "What a wonderful person you are, Sarah," he breathed.

I returned the pressure. "He wasn't being unfair, Ger," I said. "He simply knew that she was flighty and irresponsible, whereas he trusted my judgment and common sense—and, of course, he knew I'd always provide for her." (What a familiar ring *that* had!)

Well, Ger swallowed it whole, and assured me he'd never give Natalie any idea he knew the "truth."

He kissed me good night later on, a very satisfactory kiss. I looked at him dreamily. "Poor Natalie," I said softly.

"Natalie who?" he said, and kissed me again.

Saturday, October 8

Things are splendid on the one hand, utterly impossible on the other. Ger has asked me to marry him (predictably, after our little heart-to-heart last Saturday—I have no illusions about his being in love with me, and know I'm vastly more attractive with money behind me, but I'm perfectly satisfied nonetheless). Natalie, I think, has gone a little mad. She fairly spits at me, is barely civil to Ger, and is swallowing tranquilizers and a whole pharmacopoeia of Dr. Martin's stomach nostrums.

Things can't keep up like this, especially with my position so precarious. Ger is not overly bright, but any fool could do some checking up on deeds and bank accounts . . . well, something will have to be done, and soon.

Monday, October 10

I seem to have plunged in over my head again—maybe Natalie is right, to a certain extent. I really should think things out more carefully. As affairs now stand, marriage with Ger is out of the question—if he doesn't discover the truth before, he certainly will after we're married. I simply couldn't face the inevitable denouement. Nor will I leave this house, ever—and a *ménage à trois* with *her* doesn't bear thinking about.

Only one solution.

Natalie must go.

Wednesday, October 12

I have considered all possible methods and discarded as unworkable all but one—poison. And I have it right at hand—out in the tool shed. Papa always insisted on nicotine spray for the roses, and I remember his warning us that even one drop of it would kill us instantly—we were *never* allowed in the shed. Our gardener, old Mr. Tomaselli, still uses the stuff. He's a stickler for the old-fashioned ways, but I can nip out there any time and pour some into an aspirin bottle.

So much for that.

Now to work out the *modus operandi*.

Saturday, October 15

Not much sleep last night, but well worth the loss. I have it all planned. Next Friday is our birthday, and for years we've religiously observed a certain ritual. Just before ten p.m., the time of our birth, we meet in Papa's study. I bring in a tray with iced champagne and two glasses that Papa gave us when we were children (he used to put a little champagne or wine in each glass, bless his heart, so that we could join in family festivities). Natalie's is a deep-green little crystal goblet, and mine a beautiful cobalt blue. According to custom, I set the tray on a low table by the fireplace, fetch one green and one blue candle from the library table, and solemnly set them alight, one on each side of the champagne tray. Then we toast each other at the stroke of ten.

I can easily put a few drops in her goblet before I carry in the tray—surely it will be unnoticeable in that sparkling green crystal. And Ger is flying to the coast next weekend to do a TV commercial, so he'll be out of the way.

Perfect.

Friday, October 21, 5 p.m.

Everything's ready. I was afraid she might refuse to take part in the ceremony this year, all things considered, but she agreed, although coldly.

I set the stage by calling Dr. Martin this afternoon, telling him Natalie had had a bad seizure—abdominal cramps and vomiting—and would he be available that evening in the event her condition

didn't improve. If I know that old fool, and I do after all these years, he'll sign the death certificate without a murmur—after all, hasn't he warned us constantly that we were eating and agitating ourselves into an early grave? And if the question of an autopsy should come up, I'll become hysterical and forbid any cutting-up of my dear sister when she obviously died of natural causes—not that it will come to that.

Have to prepare the birthday dinner now—I'll really outdo myself tonight. We'll start with Aubergines Caviare, followed by Consommé Vert, then Coquille St. Jacques Poulette, and Caneton à l'Orange. And wine from Papa's cellar, of course, but not much for me—I'll need a steady hand later. Something simple for desert—perhaps a chocolate mousse. She's a glutton for chocolate.

Might as well send her off in style.

And I'm sure Dr. M. will be properly horrified at that Lucullan repast.

Friday, October 21, 9:40 p.m.

Zero hour approaches.

Just time for a brief entry before I bring out the tray. Have been nervous all day, but now, strangely, I'm icy calm. Goblet with its lethal drops ready and waiting.

Anything I've overlooked? I'm sure not. (Remember to put diary back on cookbook shelf where no one, I'm sure, will find it).

So that's it.

'Bye, 'bye, Natalie.

Requiescat in pace.

"It wasn't suicide, Lieutenant," said Dr. Martin.

Lieutenant Chernoff grunted. "It sure as hell looked like it," he said. "The whole setup reeked of it."

"No," said the doctor. "I've known the Winters for thirty-odd years now. And believe me, they loved themselves as much as they hated each other. Suicide?" He shook his head. "Never. But more to the point, I had a phone call from Sarah yesterday afternoon. She told me Natalie had had a severe seizure earlier in the day, and wanted to know if I'd be available that evening if she needed me."

Lieutenant Chernoff raised his eyebrows. "Laying the groundwork for another—and final—attack," he said thoughtfully.

"Exactly," said the doctor. "I suppose in her ignorance she assumed I'd write it off as a fatal gastrointestinal attack—the lord

knows I warned them often enough."

The Lieutenant frowned. "In that case, then, she must have taken—"

"No," said the doctor again. "An hour or so later my nurse took another call while I was busy with a patient, this time from Natalie. She said Sarah had been ill during the afternoon and would I be free to drop around that night if she became worse. Lieutenant, those two looked alike, thought alike, and hated alike."

"You mean, the Misses Winter murdered each other."



DETECTIVERSE

MURDER ON DEMAND

by DOROTHY A. COLLINS

She snapped, "You'll drive me to my grave!"
And he, who'd always been her slave
And quick to do as he was bid,
Backed out the car—and *did*.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 505th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . "Some people are charmingly klutzy," our heroine is "a totally fuzz-brained nincompoop"—or so she thinks . . .

The author, Patricia Moore, is under forty, married, and has two sons. Because of her husband's work (the construction business), the family has moved every two or three years. They have lived in New York, Florida, California, Oregon, and Washington ("all lovely states"), and at present they live in Southern Illinois. Mrs. Moore likes reading, writing, and swimming, loves animals, and can no longer say she "remains unsung and unpublished" . . .

ALL THUMBS

by **PATRICIA MOORE**

There are degrees of incompetence. Some people are charmingly klutzy; I am a totally fuzz-brained nincompoop. It was a normal day if I began it by burning the morning toast beyond recognition and ended it by overwinding the alarm clock until its innards expired, with a plethora of disasters large and small in between.

Not only was my behavior frustrating and embarrassing, it left me in terror that Howard would become fed up with me. I couldn't understand why he seemed to love his helpless, hopeless wife, who couldn't approach the smallest task without botching it, and who was transformed into a quivering, sniveling lump when a real crisis developed. Granted, Howard was unusually tolerant and good-natured, but how much could he stand, when I could hardly stand myself?

Once, when he was out of town on business, I huddled in the winter cold and gloom for two days and a night because I didn't

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know how to change a blown fuse. When he finally came home I collapsed in his arms in near-hysteria.

"There, there, Emily. It's all right. I'm home now," he crooned to his big baby, and held me until I was calm enough and warm enough to breathe normally. Then he changed the fuse and everything was indeed all right for a while.

But when the clothes dryer caught fire because I could never seem to remember to clean the lint screen, I realized, even through my panic, that I was not only inept, but truly dangerous. It did occur to me to phone the fire department, but I didn't know the number, hadn't seen the telephone book in days, and didn't think of calling the operator. So I phoned Howard at his office, screaming almost incoherently as the acrid smoke billowed out from behind the dryer. By the time he had summoned the firemen and rushed home himself, the entire wall was blackened. Fortunately, the fire was soon extinguished and the damage was less than I had feared.

"You know, if she had pulled the plug the fire probably wouldn't have spread at all," one of the firemen said to Howard.

"Yes, well, she wouldn't have thought of that," Howard said quietly, and the fireman nodded his head gravely, as if in pity for the poor woman. My heart sank. They were discussing me as though I weren't there, and I was beginning to believe it.

But where had I gone, then? Surely I hadn't always been like this. My childhood had seemed perfectly normal. I hadn't really begun to foul up things until after Howard and I were married. And I was getting worse. What if one of my blunders should hurt Howard? Surely he would leave me then—either under his own power or feet first. If I didn't have Howard to lean on, I couldn't live. It was a serious problem and I confronted it the way I always did—by bawling.

After the firemen left, it took Howard nearly an hour to calm me down. He dried my tears and took me out to dinner at an expensive restaurant as a special treat, ordering for both of us, as usual. He was always most considerate and tender at times like this, and I was nearly overcome with love and gratitude. Howard beamed at me until I spilled my wine on his best suit. His smile did falter a bit then.

I muddled along, barely coping, until it was nearly time for one of Howard's thrice-yearly business trips to New York. It frightened me to think of being alone and I savored my present warm, safe

evenings with Howard. He was replacing the cracked brickwork in our fireplace, and I liked to curl up in a comfortable chair and watch him work. Through the years Howard had become very capable; he made the most difficult things look easy. How I admired him!

But all too soon he was kissing me goodbye. For a week I would be at the mercy of my household appliances, not to mention the rest of the world.

The first two days were uneventful, mainly because I was too nervous to do much of anything. But by the third day the cupboard was nearly bare—and I had to eat. Driving to the supermarket I felt the thump-bump of a flat tire. I pulled over to the curb and got out of the car, biting my lip.

It was a residential area and I knew the nearest service station was at least six long blocks away. Should I walk? What if, when I got there, they couldn't spare anyone to come and help me? Maybe it would be better to ask to use someone's phone to check with the station first. But again, what if they couldn't send help?

Maybe some man in the neighborhood would be willing to change the tire if I offered to pay him. Would five dollars be enough? Too much? He might even be insulted at the offer of money and stalk away in a temper. What to do? I cradled my head in my hands and longed for Howard.

"I see you're having a little problem," a voice behind me said. I turned to see a small woman standing there.

"Oh, yes! I wonder—is your husband home?"

She shook her head, "No, but I'll help you, if you like."

"Thank you, but I really need someone to change my tire."

She raised an eyebrow. "No problem. Got a jack in the trunk?" I nodded. "Okay, let's get some rocks under these wheels. Now I'm going to give you the instructions and let you do most of the work." This was clearly a no-nonsense lady, and I trembled.

"First, the hubcap comes off," she said. "Now, this is a lug wrench and it fits over the wheel nut, like so. There. Now the nut is loose. You try the next one."

I strained, eyes bulging nearly out of my head with the effort, but the nut wouldn't budge.

"Try standing on the extension arm of the wrench," she said. "There you go!"

I was thoroughly intimidated by this brusque woman, yet for some strange reason I desperately wished to please her. Her

rapid-fire instructions whirled in my brain. "Shake the car to make sure it's firmly on the jack... roll that tire over here... okay... tighten the nuts—tighter!... all finished." She had led me through the process and somehow, incredibly, I had done it.

"Now, wasn't that easy? Next time you get a flat tire you'll know just what to do," she said. Dusting off her dustless hands, she walked away while I was still thanking her. Dirty and grinning, I drove away.

For the rest of the day I felt a wild exhilaration. It wasn't until that evening that I realized how well the remainder of the day had gone. I hadn't fouled up a single thing. I had even managed to operate the vacuum cleaner, my particular nemesis, without becoming entangled in its menacing cord.

It was a cool evening, and as I curled up with a book I wished Howard had had time to finish repairing the fireplace before he'd gone.

I don't know what possessed me to consider doing the job myself. I can only say that the tire-changing episode had given me a magical, glorious peep beyond the walls of my incompetence. There was hope out there.

All the cracked and loose bricks had been removed and only a dozen or so new ones remained to be set in place. There they were, many more than enough, stacked and waiting near the hearth. I had watched Howard do it; could I do it too?

Carefully I mixed the mortar: one part masonry cement, three parts sand, four parts determination, and I was ready.

I began gingerly, but after the first few bricks were laid, the work went smoothly. In fact, I had a great deal less trouble with those bricks than I'd had icing a layer cake the week before. The technique was similar—and the bricks were a lot more cooperative. When I'd finished, I had to admit it looked good.

Humming "Everything's Coming Up Roses," I swept up, showered, toasted myself with a cup of hot chocolate, and went to bed happier than I'd been in years. Howard would be proud of me. It would strengthen our relationship for sure.

When he came home a few days later, I ran to greet him at the door.

"Hey, you look great, honey," he said, wrapping me in his arms. "You must have gotten a lot of sleep while I was gone."

"Oh, no, actually I've been keeping *very* busy," I said in an at-

tempt to be mysterious. But I could contain myself no longer, and tugging at his hand like an eager child, I led him into the living room.

Howard's mouth dropped open when he saw the completed fireplace. "Emily, there was no need for you to hire someone to finish it," he said gently.

"But that's the surprise. I did it myself!"

He laughed. "Come on, who'd you get to do it?"

"I did it, honestly I did! And I changed a flat tire!" I babbled gleefully.

"That's impossible. You can't do anything right," he said, still laughing. And then he looked into my eyes and something flickered in his own. He believed me.

Still, he fought it. As quick as a breath, his face turned contemptuous. "You're just a stupid broad. You—can't—do—anything," he repeated firmly, as though he were a hypnotist confronted with a particularly recalcitrant subject.

I stared at him, understanding now. *This* was Howard, this cruel stranger who, with his chuckles and gentle denigrations, had led me to believe I was what he had wanted me to be all along. It had begun with subtle teasings at ordinary mistakes. As my confidence and ability had waned, my dependence on Howard had increased. And Howard had bloomed, because my weakness had made him stronger.

He bent to look at my beautiful brickwork. "Sloppy, sloppy, sloppy. For God's sake, Emily, now I'll have to—"

I picked up the poker and brought it smashing down on his head. "You never even showed me how to change a fuse," I said.

Humming "I Am Woman," I worked late that night. Having decided that I would be too busy with various projects to spend quiet evenings by the fireplace, I bricked it up. It was a job well done, if I do say so myself.

And it has certainly cemented my relationship with Howard.

"Q"

an "unknown" short story by

CORNELL WOOLRICH

"Death Between Dances" is virtually unknown, even to Cornell Woolrich devotees. The story first appeared about thirty years ago in a magazine called "Shadow Mystery," and so far as we have been able to check, has never been reprinted until now. Francis M. Nevins, Jr., a recognized authority on Cornell Woolrich's work, describes the story as "hauntingly written and evoked." And Hal Knott, another authority on Cornell Woolrich, considers it "one of the very best uncollected (in book form) Woolrich stories" . . .

DEATH BETWEEN DANCES

by **CORNELL WOOLRICH**

Every Saturday night you'd see them together at the country-club dance. Together, and yet far apart. One sitting back against the wall, never moving from there, never once getting up to dance the whole evening long. The other swirling about the floor, passing from partner to partner, never still a moment.

The two daughters of Walter Brainard (widower, 52, stocks and bonds, shoots 72 at golf, charter member of the country club).

Nobody seeing them for the first time ever took them for sisters. It wasn't only the difference in their ages, though that was great enough and seemed even greater than it actually was. There was about 12 years' difference between them, and 50 in outlook.

Even their names were peculiarly appropriate. Jane, as plain as her name, sitting there against the wall, dark hair drawn severely back from her forehead, watching the festivities through heavy-rimmed glasses that gave her an expression of owlsh inscrutability. And Sunny, dandelion-colored hair, blue eyes, a dancing sunbeam, glinting around the floor, no one boy ever able

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to hold her for very long (you can't make sunbeams stay in one place if they don't want to). Although Tom Reed, until just recently, had had better luck at it than the rest. But the last couple of Saturday nights he seemed to be slipping or something; he'd become just one of the second-stringers again.

Sunny was usually in pink, one shade of it or another. She favored pink; it was her color. She reminded you of pink spun-sugar candy. Because it's so good, and so sweet, and so harmless. But it also melts so easily . . .

One of them had a history, one hadn't. Well, at 18 you can't be expected to have a history yet. You can make one for yourself if you set out to, but you haven't got it yet. And as for the history—Jane's—it wasn't strictly that, either, because history is hard-and-fast facts, and this was more of a formless thing, a whispered rumor, a half-forgotten legend. It had never lived, but it had never died either.

Some sort of blasting infatuation that had come along and changed her from what she'd been then, at 18—the darling of the dance floors, as her sister was now—into what she was now: a wallflower, an onlooker who didn't take part. She'd gone away for a while, around that time, and then she'd suddenly been back again.

From the time she'd come back, she'd been as she was now. That was all that was definitely known, the rest was pure surmise. Nobody had ever found out exactly who the man was. It was generally agreed that it wasn't anyone from around here. Some said there had been a quiet annulment. Some—more viperishly—said there hadn't been anything to annul.

One thing was certain. She was a wallflower by choice and not by compulsion. As far back as people could remember, anyone who had ever asked her to dance received only a shake of her head. They stopped asking, finally. She wanted to be left alone, so she was. Maybe, it was suggested, she had first met him, whoever he was, while dancing, and that was why she had no use for dancing any more. Then in that case, others wondered, why did she come so regularly to the country club? To this there were a variety of answers, none of them wholly satisfactory.

"Maybe," some shrugged, "it's because her father's a charter member of the club; she thinks it's her duty to be present."

"Maybe," others said, "she sees ghosts on the dance floor; sees someone there that the rest of us can't see."

"And maybe," still others suggested, but not very seriously, "she's waiting for him to come back to her: thinks he'll suddenly show up some time in the Saturday night crowd, and come over to her and claim her. That's why she won't dance with anyone else."

But the owlsh glasses gave no hint of what was lurking behind them; whether hope or resignation, love or indifference or hate.

At exactly 9:45 this Saturday, this Washington's Birthday Saturday, tonight, the dance is on full-blast; the band is playing an oldie, *The Object of My Affections*, Number Twenty in the leader's book. And Jane is sitting back against the wall. Sunny is twinkling about on the floor, this time in the arms of Tom Reed, the boy who loved her all through high school, the man who still does, now, at this very moment—

She stopped short, right in the middle of the number, detached his arm from her waist, and stepped back from its half embrace.

"Wait here, Tom. I just remembered. I have to make a phone-call."

"I no sooner get you than I lose you again."

But she'd already turned and was moving away from him, looking back over her shoulder now.

He tried to follow her. She laughed and held him back. A momentary flattening of her hands against his shirt-front was enough to do that. "No, you can't come with me. Oh, don't look so dubious. It's just to Martha, back at our house. Something I forgot to tell her when we left. You wouldn't be interested."

"But we'll lose this dance."

"I'll give you—I'll give you one later, to make up for it," she promised. "I'll foreclose on somebody else's." She gave him a smile, and even a little wink, and that held him. "Now, be a good boy and stay in here."

She made sure that he was standing still first. It was like leaving a lifesize toy propped up—you wait a second to make sure it won't fall over. Then she turned and went out into the foyer.

She looked back at him from there, once more. He was standing obediently stock-still in the middle of the dance floor like an ownerless pup, everyone else circling around him. She raised a cautioning index finger, shook it at him. Then she whisked from sight.

She went over to the checkroom cubbyhole.

"Will you let me have that now, Marie."

"Leaving already, Miss Brainard?" The girl raised a small overnight case from the floor—it hadn't been placed on the shelves, where it might have been seen and recognized—and passed it to her.

Sunny handed her something. "You haven't seen me go, though."

"I understand, Miss Brainard," the girl said.

She hurried out of the club with it.

She went over to where the cars were parked, found a small coffee-colored roadster, and put the case on the front seat.

Then she got in after it and drove off.

The clubhouse lights receded in the indigo February darkness. The music got fainter, and then you couldn't hear it any more. It stayed on in her mind, though: still playing, like an echo.

"The object of my affections
Can change my complexion
From white to rosy-red—"

The car purred along the road. She looked very lovely, and a little wild, her uncovered hair streaming backward in the wind. The stars up above seemed to be winking at her, as though she and they shared the same conspiracy.

After a while she took one hand from the wheel and fumbled in the glittering little drawstring bag dangling from her wrist.

She took out a very crumbled note, its envelope gone. The note looked as though it had been hastily crushed and thrust away, to protect it from discovery, immediately after first being received.

She smoothed it out now as best she could and reread it carefully by the dashboard light. A part of it, anyway.

"—there's a short cut that'll bring you to me even quicker, darling. No one knows of it but me, and now I'm sharing it with you. It will keep you from taking the long way around, on the main road, and risk being seen by anyone. Just before you come to that lighted filling station at the intersection, turn off, sharp left. Even though there doesn't seem to be anything there, keep going, don't be frightened. You'll pick up a back lane, and that'll bring you safely to me. I'll be counting the minutes—"

She pressed it to her lips, the crumpled paper, and kissed it fer-

vently. Love is a master alchemist: it can turn base things to gold.

She put it back in her bag. The stars were still with her, winking. The music was still with her, playing for her alone.

“—every time he holds my hand
And tells me that he’s mine.”

Just before she came to that lighted filling station at the intersection, she swung the wheel and turned off sharp left into gritty nothingness that rocked and swayed the car.

Her headlights picked up a screen of trees and she went around to the back of them. She found a disused dirt lane there—as love had promised her she would—and clung to it over rises and hollows, and through shrubbery that hissed at her.

And then at last a little rustic lodge. A hidden secret place. Cheerful amber light streaming out to welcome her. Another car already there, offside in the darkness; his.

She braked in front of it. She took out her mirror, and by the dashboard light she smoothed her hair and touched a golden tube of lipstick lightly to her mouth. Very lightly, for there would be kisses that would take it away again soon.

She tapped the horn, just once.

Then she waited for him to come out to her.

The stars kept winking up above the pointed fir trees. Their humor was a little crueller now, as though someone were the butt of it. And in the lake that glistened like dark-blue patent leather, down the other way, their winking still went on, upside down in the water.

She tapped the horn again, more heavily this time, twice in quick succession.

He didn’t come out. The yellow thread outlining the lodge-door remained as it was; it grew no wider.

An owl hooted somewhere in the trees, but she wasn’t afraid. She’d only just learned what love was; how should she have had time to learn what fear was?

She opened the car door abruptly and got out. Her footfalls crunched on the sandy ground that sloped down from here all the way to the lake. Silly, fragile sandals meant for the dance floor, their spike heels pecking into the crusty frosty ground.

She went up onto the plank porch, and there they sounded hol-

low. She knocked on the door, and that sounded hollow too. Like when you knock on an empty shell of something.

The door moved at last, but it was her own knock that had done it; it was unfastened. The yellow thread widened.

She pushed it back, and warmth and brightness gushed out, the night was driven to a distance.

"Hoo-hoo," she called softly. "You have a caller. There's a young lady at your door, to see you."

A fire was blazing in the natural-stone fireplace, gilding the walls and coppering the ceiling with its restless tides of reflection. There was a table, all set and readied for two. The feast of love. Yellow candles were twinkling on it; their flames had flattened for a moment, now they straightened again as she came in and closed the door behind her.

Flowers were on it in profusion, and sparkling, spindly-stemmed glasses. And under it there was a gilt ice pail, with a pair of gold-capped bottles protruding from it at different angles.

And on the wooden peg projecting from the wall, his hat and coat were hanging. With that scarf she knew so well dangling carelessly from one of the pockets.

She laughed a little, mischievously.

As she passed the table, on her way deeper into the long room, she helped herself to a salted almond, crunched it between her teeth. She laughed again, like a little girl about to tease somebody. Then she picked up a handful of almonds and began throwing them one by one against the closed bedroom-door, the way you throw gravel against a windowpane to attract someone's attention behind it.

Each one went *tick!* and fell to the floor.

At last, when she'd used up all the almonds, she gave vent to a deep breath of exasperation, that was really only pretended exasperation, and stepped directly up to it and knocked briskly.

"Are you asleep in there, or what?" she demanded. "Is this any way to receive your intended? After I come all the way up here—"

Silence.

A log in the fire cracked sharply. One of the gilt-topped bottles slumped lower in the pail, the ice supporting it crumbling.

"I'm coming in there, ready or not."

She flung the door open.

He was asleep. But in a distorted way, as she'd never yet seen anyone sleep. On the floor alongside the bed, with his face turned

upward to the ceiling, and one arm flung over his eyes protectively.

Then she saw the blood. Stilled, no longer flowing. Not very old, but not new either.

She ran to him, for a second only, tried to raise him, tried to rouse him. And all she got was soddenness. Then after that, she couldn't touch him any more, couldn't go near him again. It wasn't he any more. He'd gone, and left this—this *thing*—behind him. This awful thing that didn't even talk to you, take you in its arms, hold you to it.

She didn't scream. Death was too new to her. She barely knew what it was. She hadn't lived long enough.

She began to cry. Not because he was dead, but because she'd been cheated, she had no one to take her in his arms now. First heartbreak. First love. Those tears that never come more than once.

She was still kneeling there, near him.

Then she saw the gun. Lying there. Dark, ugly, dangerous-looking. His, but too far across the room for him to have used it himself. Even she, dimly, realized that. How could it get all the way over there, with him all the way over here?

She began crawling toward it on hands and knees.

Her hand went out toward it, hesitated, finally closed on it, picked it up. She knelt there, holding it between both hands, staring at it in fascinated horror—

"Drop that! Put it down!"

The voice was like a whip across her face, stinging in its suddenness, its lashing sharpness. Then leaving her quivering all over, as an aftermath.

Tom Reed was standing there in the doorway, like a tuxedoed phantom. Bare-headed, coatless, just as he'd left the dance floor and run out after her into the cold of the February night.

"You fool," he breathed with soft, suppressed intensity. "You fool, oh you little fool!"

A single frightened whimper, like the mewing of a helpless kitten left out in the rain, sounded from her.

He went over to her, for she was crouched there, incapable of movement; he raised her in his arms, caught her swiftly to him, turned her away, with a gesture that was both rough and tender at the same time. The toe of his shoe edged deftly forward, and the gun slithered out of her sight somewhere along the floor.

"I didn't do it!" she protested, terrified. "I didn't! Oh, Tom, I swear—"

"I know you didn't," he said almost impatiently. "I was right behind you, coming up here. I would have heard the shot, and I didn't."

All she could say to that was, "Oh, Tom," with a shudder.

"Yes, 'oh, Tom,' after the damage is done. Why wasn't it 'oh, Tom' before that?" His words were a rebuke, his gestures a consolation that belied them. "I saw you leave and came right after you. Who did you think you were fooling, with your 'phone-call home'? You blind little thing. I was too tame for you. You had to have excitement. Well, now you've got it." And all the while his hand stroked the sobbing golden-haired head inert against his shoulder.

"You wanted to know life. You couldn't wait. Well, now you do. How do you like it?"

"Is this—?" she choked.

"This is what it can be like—if you don't watch out where you're going."

"I'll never—I'll never—oh, Tom, I'll never—"

"I know," he said. "They all say that. All the little, helpless purring things. After it's too late."

Her head came up suddenly, in renewed terror. "Oh, Tom, is it too late?"

"Not if I can get you back to that dance unnoticed—you've only been away from the club about half an hour—" He drew his head back, still holding her in his arms and looked at her intently. "Who was he?"

"I met him last summer, when I was away. All of a sudden he showed up here. I never expected him to. He's only been here a few days. I lost my head, I guess—"

"How is it nobody ever saw him around here, even the few days you say he's been here? Why did he make himself so inconspicuous?"

"He wanted it that way, and I don't know—I guess to me it seemed more romantic."

He murmured something under his breath that sounded like, "Sure, at eighteen it would." Then aloud, and quite bitterly, he said, "What was he hiding from? Who was he hiding from?"

"He was going to—we were going to be married," she said.

"You wouldn't have been married," he told her with quiet scorn.

She looked at him aghast.

"Oh, there would have been a ceremony, I suppose. For how long? A week or two, a month. And then you'd come creeping back alone. The kind that does his courting under cover doesn't stick to you for long."

"How do you know?" she said, crushed.

"Ask your sister Jane sometime. They say she found that out once, long ago. And look at her now. Embittered for all the rest of her life. Eaten up with hate—"

He changed the subject abruptly. He tipped up her chin and looked searchingly at her. "Are you all right now? Will you do just as I tell you? Will you be able to—go through with this, carry it off?"

She nodded. Her lips formed the words, barely audible, "If you stay with me."

"I'm with you. I was never so with you before."

With an arm about her waist, he led her over toward the door. As they reached and passed it, her head stirred slightly on his shoulder. He guessed its intent, quickly forestalled it with a quieting touch of his hand.

"Don't look at him. Don't look back. He *isn't there*. You were never here either. Those are the two things you have to keep saying to yourself. We've all had bad dreams at times, and this was yours. Now wait here outside the door a minute. I've got things to do. Don't watch me."

He left her and went back into the room again.

After a moment or two she couldn't resist: the horrid fascination was too strong, it was almost like a hypnotic compulsion. She crept back to the threshold, peered around the edge of the door-frame into the room beyond, and watched with bated breath what he was doing.

He went after the gun first. Got it back from where he'd kicked it. Picked it up and looked it over with painstaking care. He interrupted himself once to glance down at the form lying on the floor, and by some strange telepathy she knew that something about the gun had told him it belonged to the dead man, that it hadn't been brought in from outside. Perhaps something about its type or size that she would not have understood; she didn't know anything about guns.

Then she saw him break it open and do something to it with deft fingers, twist or spin something. A cartridge fell out into the

palm of his hand. He stood that aside for a minute, upright on the edge of the dresser. Then he closed up the gun again. He took out his own handkerchief and rubbed the gun thoroughly all over with it.

Each time she thought he was through, he'd blow his breath on it and steam it up, and then rub it some more. He even pulled the whole length of the handkerchief through the little guard where the trigger was, and made that click emptily a couple of times.

He worked fast but he worked calmly, without undue excitement, keeping his presence of mind.

Finally he wrapped the handkerchief in its entirety around the butt, so that his own bare hand didn't touch it. Holding it in that way, he knelt down by the man. He took the hand, took it by the very ends, by the fingers, and closed them around the gun, first subtracting the handkerchief. He pressed the fingers down on it, pressed them hard and repeatedly, the way you do when you want to take an impression of something.

Then he fitted them carefully around it in a grasping position; even pushed one, the index-finger, through that same trigger guard. He watched a minute to see if the gun would hold, that way, on its own, without his own supporting hand around the outside of the other. It did; it dipped a little, but it stayed fast. Then very carefully he eased it, and the hand now holding it, back to the floor, left them there together.

Then he got up and went back to the cartridge. He saw her mystified little face peering in at him around the edge of the door. "Don't watch, I told you," he rebuked her.

But she kept right on, and he went ahead without paying any further attention to her.

He took out a pocketknife and prodded away at the cartridge with it, until he had it separated into two parts. Then he went back to the dead man and knelt down by him. What she saw him do next was sheer horror.

But she had only herself to blame; he'd warned her not to look.

He turned the head slightly, very carefully, until he'd revealed the small, dark, almost neat little hole, where the blood had originally come from.

He took one half of the dissected cartridge, tilted it right over it, and shook it gently back and forth. As though—as though he were salting the wound from a small shaker. Her hands flew to her mouth to stifle the gasp this tore from her.

He thrust the pieces of cartridge into his pocket, both of them. Then he struck a match. He held it for a moment to let the flame steady itself and shrink a little. Then he gave it a quick dab at the gunpowdered wound and then back again.

There was a tiny flash from the wound. For an instant it seemed to ignite. Then it went right out again. A slightly increased blackness remained around the wound now; he'd charred it. This time a sick moan escaped through her suppressing hands. She turned away at last.

When he came out he found her at the far end of the outside room, with her back to him. She was twitching slightly, as though she'd just recovered from a nervous chill.

She couldn't bring herself to ask the question, but he could read it in her eyes when she turned to stare at him.

"The gun was his own, or the user wouldn't have left it behind. I had to do that other thing. A gun suicide's always a contact wound. They press it hard against themselves. And with a contact wound there are always powder burns."

Then he said with strange certainty, "A woman did it."

"How do you—?"

"I found this in there with him. There must have been tears at first, and then later she dropped it when she picked up the gun."

He handed it to her. There wasn't anything distinctive about it—just a gauzy handkerchief. No monogram, no design. It could have been anyone's, anyone in a million. A faint fragrance reached her, invisible as a finespun wire but just as tenuous and for a moment she wondered at the scent.

Like lilacs in the rain.

"I couldn't leave it in there," he explained, "because it doesn't match the setup as I have it arranged now. It would have shown that somebody was in there, after all." He smiled grimly. "I'm doing somebody a big favor, a much bigger favor than she deserves. But I'm not doing it for her, I'm doing it for you, to keep even a whisper of your name from being brought into it."

Absently she thrust the wisp of stuff into her own evening bag, where she carried her own, drew the drawstring tight once more.

"Get rid of it," he advised. "You can do that easier than I can. But not anywhere around here, whatever you do."

He glanced back toward the inside room. "What else did you touch in there—besides the gun?"

She shook her head. "I just stepped in and—you found me."

"You touched the door?"

She nodded.

He whipped out his handkerchief again, crouched low on one knee, and like a strange sort of porter in a dinner jacket, scoured the doorknobs on both sides, in and out.

"What about these? Did you do that?" There were some almonds lying on the floor.

"I threw them at the door, like pebbles—to attract his attention."

"A man about to do what he did wouldn't munch almonds." He picked them up, all but one which already had been stepped on and crushed. "One won't matter. He could have done that himself," he told her. "Let me see your shoe." He bent down and peered at the tilted sole. "It's on there. Get rid of them altogether when you get home. Don't just scrape it; they have ways of bringing out things like that."

"What about the whole supper table itself? It's for two."

"That'll have to stay. Whoever he was expecting didn't come and in a fit of depression aging Romeo played his last role, alone. That'll be the story it tells. At least it'll show that no one *did* come. If we disturb a perfect setup like that, we may prove the opposite to what we're trying to."

He put his arm about her. "Are you ready now? Come on, here we go. And remember: *you were never here. None of this ever happened.*"

A sweep of his hand, behind his back, a swing of the door, and the light faded away; they were out in the starry blue night together.

"Whose car is that?"

"My own. The roadster Daddy gave me. I had Rufus run it down to the club for me and leave it outside, after we all left for the dance."

"Did he check it?"

"No, I told him not to."

He heaved a sigh of relief. "Good. We've got to get them both out of here. I'll get in mine. You'll have to get back into the one you brought, by yourself. I'll lead the way. Stick to my treads, so you don't leave too clear a print. It will probably snow again before they find him, and that'll save us."

He went on ahead to his own car, got in, and started the motor.

Suddenly he left it warming up, jumped out again, and came back to her. "Here," he said abruptly, "hang onto this until I can get you back down there again." And pressed his lips to hers with a sort of tender encouragement.

It was the strangest kiss she'd ever had. It was one of the most selfless, one of the nicest.

The two cars, trundled away, one behind the other. After a little while the echo of their going drifted back from the lonely lake. And then there was just silence.

The lights and the music, like a warm friendly tide, came swirling around her again. He stopped her for a moment, just outside the entrance, before they went in.

"Did anyone see you leave?"

"Only Marie, the check girl. The parking attendant didn't know about the car."

"Hand me your lipstick a minute," he ordered.

She got it out and gave it to him. He made a little smudge with it, on his own cheek, high up near the ear. Then another one farther down, closer to the mouth. Not too vivid, faint enough to be plausible, distinct enough to be seen.

He even thought of his tie, pulled it a little awry. He seemed to think of everything. Maybe that was because he was only thinking of one thing: of her.

He slung a proprietary arm about her waist. "Smile," he instructed her. "Laugh. Put *your* arm around *my* waist. Act as if you really cared for me. We're having a giddy time. We're just coming in from a session in a parked car outside."

The lights from the glittering dance floor went up over them like a slowly raised curtain. They strolled past the checkroom girl, arm over arm, faces turned to one another, prattling away like a pair of grammar-school kids, all taken up in one another. Sunny threw her head back and emitted a paean of frivolous laughter, at something he was supposed to have said just then.

The check girl's eyes followed them with a sort of wistful envy. It must be great, she thought, to be so carefree and have such a good time. Not a worry on your mind.

At the edge of the floor they stopped. He took her in his arms to lead her.

"Keep on smiling, you're doing great. We're going to dance. I'm going to take you once around the floor, until we get over to

where your father and sister are. Wave to people, call out their names as we pass them. I want everyone to see you. Can you do it? Will you be all right?"

She took a deep, resolute breath. "If you want me to. Yes. I can do it."

They went gliding out into the middle of the floor.

The band was back to Number Twenty in the books—the same song they had been playing when she left. It must have been a repeat by popular demand, it couldn't have been going on the whole time, she'd been away too long. What a different meaning it had now.

"—But instead I trust him implicitly

I'll go where he wants to go,

Do what he wants to do, I don't care—"

That sort of fitted Tom. That was for him; nobody else. Sturdy reliability. That was what you wanted, that was what you came back to, if you were foolish enough to stray from it in the first place. Sometimes you found that out too late; sometimes it took you a lifetime, it cost you your youth. Like what they said had happened to poor Jane, ten or twelve years ago when she herself, Sunny, had been still a child.

But Sunny was lucky, she had found it out in time. It had only taken her—well, the interval between a pair of dance selections, played the same night, at the same club. It had only cost her—well, somebody else had paid the debt for her.

And so, it was back where it had begun. And as it had begun.

At exactly 10:55 this Saturday, this Washington's Birthday Saturday, the dance is still on full-blast; the band is playing *The Object of My Affections*, Number Twenty in the leader's book. Jane is sitting back against the wall. And Sunny is twinkling about on the floor, once more in the arms of Tom Reed, the boy who loved her all through high school, the man who still does now at this very moment, the man who always will, through all the years ahead—

"Here are your people," he whispered warningly. "I'm going to turn you over to them now."

She glanced at them across his shoulder. They were sitting there, Jane and her father, so safe, so secure. Nothing ever happened to them. Less than an hour ago she would have felt sorry

for them. Now she envied them.

She and Tom came to a neat halt in front of them.

"Daddy," she said quietly. And she hadn't called him that since she was 15. "Daddy, I want to go home now. Take me with you."

He chuckled. "You mean before they even finish playing down to the very last half note? I thought you never got tired dancing."

"Sometimes I do," she admitted wistfully. "And I guess this is one of those times."

He turned to his other daughter. "How about you, Jane? Ready to go now?"

"I've been ready," she said, "ever since we first got here, almost."

The father's eyes had rested for a moment on the telltale red traces on Tom's cheek. They twinkled quizzically, but he tactfully refrained from saying anything.

Not Jane. "Really, Sunny," she said disapprovingly. And then, curtly, to Tom: "Fix your cheek."

He went about it very cleverly, pretending he couldn't find it with his handkerchief for a minute. "Where? Here?"

"Higher up," said Jane. And this time Mr. Brainard smothered an indulgent little smile.

Sunny and Tom trailed them out to the entrance, when they got up to go. "Give me your spare garage key," he said in an undertone. "I'll run the roadster home as soon as you leave, and put it away for you. I can get up there quicker with it than you will with the big car. I'll see that Rufus doesn't say anything; I'll tell him you and I were going to elope tonight and changed our minds, at the last minute."

"He's always on my side, anyway," she admitted.

He took a lingering leave of her by the hand.

"I have a question to ask you. But I'll keep it until next Saturday. The same place? The same time?"

"I have the answer to give you. But I'll keep that until next Saturday too. The same place. The same time."

She got in the back seat with her father and sister, and they drove off.

"It's beginning to snow," Jane complained.

Thanks, murmured Sunny, unheard, *Thanks*, as the first few flakes came sifting down.

Jane bunched her shoulders defensively. "It gets too hot in there, with all those people. And now it's chilly in the car." She

stifled a sneeze, fumbled in her evening bag. "Now, what did I do with my handkerchief?"

"Here, I'll give you mine," offered Sunny, and heedlessly passed her something in the dark, out of her own bag.

A faint fragrance, invisible as a finespun wire but just as tenuous. Like lilacs in the rain.

Jane raised it toward her nose, held it there, suddenly arrested. "Why, this *is* mine! Don't you recognize my sachet? Where'd you find it?"

Sunny didn't answer. Something had suddenly clogged her throat. She recognized the scent now. Lilacs in the rain.

"Where did you find it?" Jane insisted.

"Hattie—Hattie turned it over to me in the ladies' lounge. You must have lost it in there—"

"Why, I wasn't—" Jane started to say. Then just as abruptly she didn't go ahead.

Sunny knew what she'd been about to say. "I wasn't in there once the whole evening." Jane disliked the atmosphere of gossip that she imagined permeated the lounge, the looks that she imagined would be exchanged behind her back. Sunny hadn't thought quickly enough. But it was too late now.

Jane was holding the handkerchief pressed tight to her mouth. Just holding it there.

Impulsively Sunny reached out, found Jane's hand in the dark, and clasped it warmly and tightly for a long moment.

It said so much, that warm clasp of hands, without a word being said. It said: I understand. We'll never speak of it, you and I. Not a word will ever pass my lips. And thank you, thank you for helping me as you have, though you may not know you did.

Presently, tremulously, a little answering pressure was returned by Jane's hand. There must have been unseen tears on her face, tears of gratitude, tears of release. She was dabbing at her eyes in the dark.

Their father, sitting comfortably and obliviously between them, spoke for the first time since the car had left the club.

"Well, another Saturday-night dance over and done with. They're all pretty much alike; once you've been to one, you've been to them all. Same old thing week in and week out. Music playing, people dancing. Nothing much ever happens. They get pretty monotonous. Sometimes I wonder why we bother going every week, the way we do."

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by **OTTO PENZLER**

BEAST: The Wolfe Pack howls! Few writers in the history of detective fiction have enjoyed the respect and popularity of Rex Stout, and even fewer detectives have inspired the devotion and admiration accorded to Nero Wolfe. At last the many fans of these two fascinating personalities will have the chance to indulge their fanaticism (if it has come to that; their affection, if it has not). Friends of Stout, Wolfe, Archie Goodwin, and other members of that magical melange on West 35th Street may join The Wolfe Pack by writing to Ellen Krieger at 28 West 69th St., New York, N.Y. 10023. Charter membership (through Dec. 31, 1978) is \$10 per year; thereafter, \$15. Annual dues entitle members to a subscription to the journal, scheduled as a quarterly, and priority registration for the planned annual banquet. The only editorial comment suitable to this happy turn of events is: Very satisfactory.

FEAST: If genuine fans of the

detective story have a common trait, it is an inability to be satisfied with one or two books about a favorite character or by a favorite author. Once hooked on the exploits of, say, Nero Wolfe or Ellery Queen or other Great Detectives, the true aficionado will never rest until all the chronicles have been read at least once. The problem, of course, is that like almost all other books even some of the greatest mysteries go out of print, gradually vanish from library shelves, and remain mere titles instead of shared adventures.

What to do? Unlike most of life's other great mysteries, there are solutions to this one. Those solutions are booksellers specializing in used, out-of-print, and rare books of mystery fiction. Because of these saviors, it is often possible to acquire used hardcover copies of distinguished books for little more than the price of a new paperback, and one can frequently be fortunate enough to purchase a first edition for only a few dollars.

among the most reliable dealers that is, those who know their books best and charge the fairest prices for them) are the following; all of whom sell books via mail order:

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Other specialty booksellers are listed in the classified advertisements at the back of this magazine; still other shops are located in Chicago (I Love a Mystery), Los Angeles (Boulevard Bookshop), New York (Isaac Mendoza Book Co.), Philadelphia (Whodunit?), San Francisco (Murder Inc.), Toronto (Bakka), and Washington, D.C. (Moonstone Bookcellars). They all deserve to be investigated.

EAST: The compilation of a good anthology is an art form that seems far simpler to those who have never attempted it than it actually is. The master anthologist of the detective story is, irrefutably, Ellery Queen, both in terms of quality (although published 37 years ago, his *101 Years' Entertainment* still ranks

as the definitive work of, its kind) and quantity (more than 90 books since his first, *Challenge to the Reader*, appeared in 1938). The most historically significant Queen anthology of recent years has just been published and is worthy of special notice. *Ellery Queen's Japanese Golden Dozen: The Detective Story World in Japan* (Charles Tuttle, Rutland, VT 05701, \$8.50) more than doubles the number of Japanese detective stories available in English translation, opening a new world for those who enjoy mystery fiction. If there is a draw-

back, it is that the collection is entirely contemporary (the 12 stories were selected from among the 2,500 published in Japan since 1970), but there is a pleasing diversity of style among the stories themselves and from those published in the Occident. For education, the informative Introduction is more than worth the price of this handsomely produced volume. For pleasure, you are sure to find this compilation uniquely intriguing. For the well-read mystery fan, it is more than a treat—it is a necessity.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by **CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

Newspaper "comic" strips have always been a mirror to the melodrama fervor of the times in which they are drawn; unfortunately, they are as well the most ephemeral of arts, and much of what they can tell us has been as irretrievably lost as forgotten cave paintings. This past year the Hyperion Press of Westport, Connecticut, has begun literally the resurrection of a vanished literature with its Classic American Comic Strip series—dated, sequential, in-depth compilations of outstanding strips from the early 1900s, presented in full continuity exactly as they ran originally in the daily and Sunday pages. Of

the nearly two-dozen volumes in the initial series, several will rivet the mystery enthusiast drawn to the long-ago thrills of this new kind of people's literature.

Sherlocko the Monk (which Hyperion reprints completely) ran from 1910 to 1912, the longest-sustained pastiche of the Conan Doyle stories. It was outlandish and farcical but no mere burlesque: creator Gus Mager was a fiendish Holmes buff, and *Sherlocko's* sleuthing followed Sherlockian ideals. "So far I have never failed upon a case; come, Watso!" (*Sherlocko* was later renamed *Hawkshaw*, and continued his investigations for nearly four more decades.) Harry Hersh-

field's breathlessly delightful *Dauntless Durham of the U.S.A.* (1913-14), with its noble, slightly Sherlockian hero and gaslit melodrama spoofery, was an early triumph of comedy suspense.

More soberly, Hyperion has brought back the complete first year (1929) of great illustrator Frank Godwin's cool, liberated *Connie*, one of the first adventurer-heroines in strip history, who at the start of the Depression became a reporter and the operator of a detective agency. Tough *Jim Hardy* ("A man alone against the world") vies with the best of Dick Tracy and Secret Agent X-9; the first year (1936) tells 'how out-of-work, homeless Jim, vaguely an ex-convict (although this startling past was later excised), routs gangland temptation and fist-fights for justice. Artist Dick Moores (who now prowls friendlier byways drawing the family saga of *Gasoline Alley*) invested Hardy with just the right mixture of raw virtue and grim courage.

Hyperion's director, Hal Dareff, now has in the working stages (among other delights) an anthology of detective strips from Charlie Chan and Red Barry to

the present. "Comic strips," he tells E Q M N, "are natural vehicles for the mystery: crisp narrative techniques, great visual impact, compressed tension, and day-to-day cliffhanger suspense. It's one of the great popular-culture storytelling devices." He also plans reprints of Tracy and the Shadow.

Scholarly Maurice Horn, who last year edited *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, the most comprehensive study so far of the genre, now gives us eye contact with *Women in the Comics* (Chelsea House, \$15), a pictorial panorama of the changing roles of American women in the medium across eighty years—and the range spills over into the mystery. Feminine assertiveness was strong in crime comics even in the thirties—Lois Lane, undercover cop Molly Day of *Radio Patrol*, reporter Mississippi of *Red Barry*—moving in the forties to the bizarre Miss Fury and Claire Voyant and more currently to the modernistic Modesty Blaise and Tiffany Jones, ladies lovely to look at but sometimes, deadlier to know who visually and adventurously have come a long way.

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

The detective story has generally been considered an English language genre. Although

British and American writers, major and minor, are regularly translated into countless other

languages, English translations of foreign mysteries, even by European writers, have been few. As for the Asian detective story, it has been represented most prominently by a series of pastiches of early Chinese tales written in English by the late Robert van Gulik.

Until very recently, the Japanese mystery story has had practically no exposure to Western readers: one short-story collection by Edogawa Rampo, one novel by Seicho Matsumoto, and that, to my knowledge, is it. Now, however, we have *Ellery Queen's Japanese Golden Dozen* (Tuttle, \$8.50), in which the work of twelve of the best Japanese mystery writers may be sampled. EQ's introduction and biographical prefaces to the stories offer a useful short history of the genre in Japan.

The stories are similar in plotting and structure to their Western equivalents. The mysteries are sometimes (though not always) a bit more transparent, but the insights into Japanese society and daily life generally prove more intriguing than the plots. Best stories to this reader are Matsumoto's documentary-style "The Cooperative Defendant," Seiichi Morimura's chilling tale of a malevolent child, "Devil of a Boy," and the contributions of Masako Togawa and Yasutaka Tsutsui. The translators, regrettably uncredited, have done a fine job, apart from some awkward attempts at English-lan-

guage slang equivalents.

With this book, the detective story's premier anthologist has made another invaluable contribution to the genre.

*** Edmund Crispin: *The Glimpses of the Moon*, Walker, \$8.95. The long-awaited return of Gervase Fen is a rich and funny English village mystery, reminiscent of John Dickson Carr in its moments of farce and slapstick and in Crispin's recurring (maybe once too often) "we're-characters-in-a-book" *schtick*. Less Carrlike is the plotting: though the point that catches the killer is a clever one, the reader has no chance at it. This is a most welcome return of an old favorite, though the style, humor, and Dickensian characterization all outshine the plot.

*** Leslie Stephan: *Murder R.F.D.*, Scribners, \$8.95. In this beautifully written mystery of rural Massachusetts, a four-man police force beats the state cops to the solution of a murder at a very small cooperative farm. Except for the rather pat and arbitrary method of trapping the killer, this is a strong novel in all areas.

*** John Wainwright: *The Jury People*, St. Martin's, \$8.95. Though you may be in doubt to the end as to just what Wainwright is saying about the British legal system, as a pure storyteller this former policeman has few peers in the field today. For a four-book-a-year man, he is

remarkably uncommitted to a set formula. The books of his I have encountered are all different, all adventurously constructed and forcefully written. On the debit side, the general attitude of this book toward minorities is well-intentioned but patronizing, and there is a bit of oversimplification in the attitudes of the various jurors.

*** Michael Allen: *Spence and the Holiday Murders*, Walker, \$7.95. This is a straightforward, uncluttered, unusually absorbing account of an English murder investigation. It supports a personal prejudice of mine that the better police procedurals generally stick to one case.

** Catherine Aird: *Parting Breath*, Doubleday-Crime Club, \$7.95. Inspector C. D. Sloan becomes involved with cozy dons and anachronistically militant students in this collegiate mystery, far from his best case despite some amusing narrative and characterization and the seemingly sure-fire academic background.

** Richard Barth: *The Rag Bag Clan*, Dial, \$6.95. When a garbage-can-scavenging rag-bag lady is murdered, yet another plucky band of senior citizens takes on the detecting chores. This unambitious and very movie-oriented debut makes a well-

executed and diverting, if slight, action thriller.

** Kin Platt: *The Screwball King Murder*, Random House, \$6.95. The latest Max Roper, brisk but banal, uses its baseball background unimaginatively and reminds me of a very routine radio whodunit in its casual acceptance of piling-up corpses.

Among the reprints, two pioneering classics of espionage fiction are available in new editions: E. Phillips Oppenheim's wonderful everything-but-the-kitchen-sink extravaganza, *The Great Impersonation* (Dover, \$3.00; originally published in 1919), and John Buchan's 1915 thriller, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (The Mystery Library, 243 12th St., Drawer P, Del Mar, CA 92104; \$7.95), with an Introduction by Michael Gilbert and fifty pages of Appendices. Another cornerstone from Mystery Library is the definitive edition of Ellery Queen's *The Tragedy of X* (\$7.95), Drury Lane's extraordinary first case, originally published in 1932 as written by Barnaby Ross. Among the added features are a new Introduction and Checklist by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., two Open Letters to the Reader by EQ (dated 1940 and 1977), and a reprint of MD magazine's 1967 profile of the Ellery Queen collaborators.

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"Q"

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EQ 108

a **NEW** short-short by

NEDRA TYRE

He had come back to Kingborough to attend the funeral of his brother-in-law. But he couldn't return to Washington without once more seeing the house that Lucy had lived in, the house in which he had experienced the greatest happiness in his life . . .

BACK FOR A FUNERAL

by **NEDRA TYRE**

John Whyte kissed his sister Alice goodbye. It was a delicate peck just at her left eyebrow. They weren't demonstrative in their family and yet they were deeply bound to each other. When John was young his devotion to his parents and his profound sense of obligation to them had been overpowering.

In those long ago years of his childhood and adolescence, children's lives—at least in the particular class to which he belonged—had been centered on their parents. Obedience had been expected and duty had been exacted. He hadn't ever once gone against his parents' wishes. Why had he been so acquiescent when they had demanded that he give up Lucy? Why hadn't he protested their extravagant statement that Lucy would be the death of him?

He was fond of Alice and proud of her beauty and fine qualities as a human being. They were the only children. She was younger by enough years to have kept them from being close when they were growing up, but since middle age had claimed them the difference in age hadn't mattered. What kept them apart now was distance. His law practice in Washington was so demanding that he came back to Kingborough only on special occasions—Christmas and Thanksgiving, graduations and weddings in the family and among close friends, and funerals. The death of Lloyd

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Roberson, Alice's husband, had brought him home this time.

Alice was bearing her loss with dignity and composure. John admired that, just as he had admired the way Alice and Lloyd had taken over the Whyte family mansion and maintained its elegance begun by their grandparents and sustained by their parents. How Alice and Lloyd had contrived to find expert plasterers and woodworkers and upholsterers mystified him. John and his wife Jenny were invariably annoyed by the shoddiness of the repairs to their house in Georgetown.

He walked toward the front door while Alice mounted the stairs to rejoin their Aunt Maud. The dining room had only a few minutes before been cleared of the buffet set out for the guests after the funeral, and he and Alice had managed to have a few quiet moments together when he had offered his help in settling Lloyd's estate. She thanked him but said that Lloyd had been as foresighted as their father and had arranged everything long before his death.

Alice and John both turned to face each other for a last goodbye. Alice was on the landing and her resemblance to their mother startled him. Their features weren't very much alike but their gestures and voice inflections were almost identical. It might have been his mother blowing him a kiss.

He had refused Alice's offer of a ride to the airport to catch the Washington plane. He had said he would go to the James Madison Hotel just around the corner where limousine service to the airport was available, and he intended to go there eventually, but first he wanted to see Lucy's house. Of course it wasn't her house now and hadn't been in the long years since her death. No matter, he felt he must see it.

On his many previous returns to Kingborough he had thought of going by Lucy's house but he had always been accompanied by one or other of his wives and it had seemed inappropriate and even slyly rude to take them out of the way to a place where he had known so much joy with another woman. Though he had visited Lucy for only a few months while he was a student at the university, the happiness he had known with her had sustained him all his life. Lucy had been the lodestar, the *sine qua non* of his life.

Of course he had been fond of his wives—indeed, he had loved them very much. There had been three. Anne, his first wife, had died, and Lynne, his second, had found someone she loved more

and there had been a discreet divorce. She still lived in Washington and they moved in the same circles and often saw each other at parties and receptions. They still liked each other. Jenny, his present wife, was a darling. They were devoted to each other and respected each other's differences. Just now she was abroad—though he had her itinerary both at home and at the office he wasn't sure of her exact location. She was addicted to travel and he abhorred the confusion of airports, the discomfort of long flights and trying to live out of a suitcase. Besides, his demanding law practice wasn't amenable to long absences and being out of touch in Afghanistan or all those other remote places that attracted Jenny. So Jenny traveled alone.

What compelled him toward Lucy's house? And it was a compulsion—there was no other word to describe it. He found himself walking vigorously and with as much pleasure as he had felt when he was 19. He remembered that he sometimes walked slowly, even deliberately loitered, to add to the final delight of seeing Lucy.

His parents' objection to Lucy had stunned him. He hadn't expected it, and even now after all those years he found it difficult to understand. But the world was different then. Who in the present, when all liberties and licenses met with acceptance if not approval, would believe that parents would object to a prospective daughter-in-law because she had been divorced and was ten years older than their son?

His mother's attitude had been outrageous. She would greet him at the front door, "Son, you haven't been to see that woman, have you?" His mother didn't even name Lucy. Lucy was "she." And when he answered yes, his mother said, "She will be the death of you." And his father was equally melodramatic. "She will be the death of you," he had repeated. And Uncle John, for whom John was named and whose heir he was, had also said that Lucy would be the death of him.

John didn't mention the bitterness of his parents' feeling to Lucy, but he did tell her of their strenuous objection, and Lucy quite understood. She had accepted it without question. She was almost as addicted to the straitlaced mores of the pre-World War II South as his parents were.

John had met Lucy in the university library where she had a job. Most of the time she worked at the front desk, and she had showed him how to make out call slips and how to use the

catalogue and where the reserve shelves were. Some days later she had smiled at him when they were sitting separately in the university cafeteria over a late lunch. Once he had offered to help take a stack of books to her apartment and she had invited him in and had made iced tea for them. Every now and then she invited him to her apartment and prepared supper.

They became deeply fond of each other. He couldn't explain their feeling for each other then and he couldn't explain it now, but he had never known such an affinity for another person in his life, and the joy of it had stayed with him until that very moment. No affection for his parents or his sister or his wives had ever compared in the slightest degree with his profound feeling for Lucy.

The house couldn't be much farther. It depressed him to see that the neighborhood had deteriorated. When Lucy had lived there it had been an area of small neat houses and apartments. He passed askew signs announcing BAD DOG——FURNISHED ROOMS——FOR SALE——MAKE US AN OFFER, and the cracked uneven sidewalks were littered with cans and broken glass.

A boy on a bicycle nearly ran him down as John arrived at Lucy's house, and he glanced up at the second floor. A lamp with a torn angled shade lighted the window of what had been her living room. He wanted to dash upstairs as he had so often done and knock on the door. Instead he stood very still and looked up and remembered all the happiness he had known there.

For a long time he didn't move and then he walked over to the street light and glanced at his watch. He would miss the plane he had intended to take.

Well, there were other planes. He didn't want to leave Lucy's house just yet.

It was strange. He couldn't remember any of their conversations and yet they had talked endlessly. He couldn't even remember the color of Lucy's eyes or of her hair or how tall she was. He could only remember what she had meant to him, the absolute joy of being with her, and he thought again of the outrageous statements made by his parents and uncle.

His parents knew nothing of Lucy's gentleness and generosity. Because of Lucy he had been happy. She had given him joy.

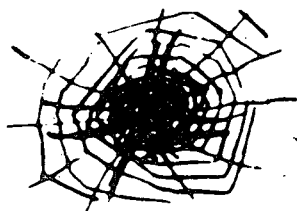
But they had said, "She will be the death of you." It was like something ordained, irrevocable, not to be escaped. They might

have been characters in a Greek drama pronouncing a curse.

"No," he said.

He had never said no to his parents, but now they seemed to be behind him and he had begun to protest violently, and then in one hideous moment of illumination and pain he realized that what his parents had said had been prophetic. His love for Lucy had brought him here to his death.

"For Pete's sake, Joe, hurry! We've got to get out of here. He really put up a fight, didn't he? Look at that watch. Have you ever seen anything like it? And all this money in the billfold. Come, on let's drag him in the alley."



DETECTIVERSE

VERDICT

by *LAURA J. UNDERWOOD*

"Murder," said the coroner grimly.

"Suicide," sobbed the victim's wife.

"Now, madam," chided the superintendent,

"How does one back into a knife?"

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a **NEW** detective story by

JACK RITCHIE

Another Henry-and-Ralph murder investigation in the indefinable and inimitable Jack Ritchie manner. Who said the art of deduction (or should we call it the art of inference?) is dead in detective stories? Not while Henry Turnbuckle and his partner Ralph are on the scene of the crime. They pull deductions out of their heads the way magicians pull rabbits out of their hats...

NO WIDER THAN A NICKEL

by **JACK RITCHIE**

I surveyed the stricken apartment. "The murderer was looking for something which was approximately the diameter of a nickel."

Ralph looked at me. "Now how do you know that, Henry? Everything's been torn apart. The sofa, the easy chair, the TV, the stereo, everything. Why did the murderer have to be looking for something the size of a nickel?"

We were in the victim's efficiency apartment, which consisted of one room, its Murphy bed, a cramped kitchenette, and a windowless bathroom.

The victim was, or had been, Everett Sharkey. Ralph—having once worked out of Burglary—recognized the body immediately.

Sharkey, who had expired at the age of approximately 45, had spent most of his adult life in prison, mainly for breaking and entering.

The cause of death, according to an informal on-the-spot diagnosis by our medical officer, had been a blow to the jaw suffi-

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ciently heavy so as to cause internal brain damage and fatal hemorrhaging.

Sharkey appeared to have been dead two or three hours. His body had been found by a paperboy who had come this Saturday morning to collect for his papers. The boy had pressed the buzzer, and when he received no answer, had—as most of us automatically do in like situations—tried the doorknob. The door had opened, he had seen the body, and run downstairs to the building superintendent.

I led Ralph back to the bathroom and picked up some of the remains of a broken aspirin bottle in the washbasin. "You will observe, Ralph, that this aspirin bottle has been deliberately broken. If the object for which the murderer was searching was larger than what would pass through the neck of this bottle, then why did he bother to break the container to delve behind its opaque exterior?"

Ralph agreed. "What do you think he was looking for, Henry? Microfilm containing the complete details of our nation's response in case of sneak atomic attack?"

"Ralph," I said, "did you know that the entire Old Testament has been put on a single piece of microfilm one-inch square? It is just a matter of a few more years before one will be able to buy the entire Congressional Library, including periodicals, all of it in a package the size of a matchbox. One simply slips the container into a projector, aims it at a wall or a ceiling, and has access to the printed wisdom and folly of the nation."

I examined the neck of the broken bottle. "You will notice that the cap of this bottle has been unscrewed and removed. This further indicates that whatever the murderer was looking for could possibly have been poured out of the bottle simply by removing its cover. However, our searcher *also* thought it pertinent to break the bottle, obviously to make certain that there was nothing still stuck in the dark depths of the container.

"This would indicate that while the object in question might have been inserted easily, it might not have been so easily withdrawn. From which I deduce that while the object had the diameter of a nickel, or less, it could have been a bit longer. And extremely valuable, of course, or why the devastating search and the murder? I rather suspect that it was a piece of jewelry. A precious stone."

"Why couldn't it have been microfilm?" Ralph asked.

"Well, whatever it was, it wasn't in that bottle."

"Why not?"

We stepped out of the bathroom. Sharkey's body was now being removed. Our fingerprint men had departed earlier with what we fairly assumed might be the fingerprints of the murderer. They had been on almost every object, or shred of object, in the room.

"Ralph," I said, "you agree that our searcher went over this apartment and its contents thoroughly. Inch by inch?"

He agreed. "He took everything apart."

"Not quite everything, Ralph. You will notice that in the completeness of his search he smashed all the light bulbs in the apartment. With one exception. One of the *two* bulbs in the fixture over the kitchenette sink is still intact."

Ralph didn't see the point. "So?"

"He didn't break the remaining bulb because it was no longer necessary. He had just found the thing he was looking for inside the bulb beside it."

Ralph considered that. "*Inside* the bulb?"

"Yes, Ralph. The criminal mind has developed a method of detaching the bulb from its stem without causing the glass to shatter. An object may be hidden inside the frosted bulb and the parts are then glued back together. No traces of the operation are apparent to the naked eye—its only fault, of course, being that the bulb will never burn again."

Ralph and I went downstairs two flights of stairs to apartment 1, which was that occupied by the building superintendent. Like all 30 units in the three-story structure it too was an efficiency apartment.

The super, an elderly man, had been expecting to be questioned, and from the aura about him I suspected that he had spent the time fortifying himself with a few drinks.

"Now, sir," I said. "What can you tell us about your tenant, the late Everett Sharkey?"

He crunched and swallowed the last bits of a breath deodorizer. "Well, nothing much. I mean he was just another tenant. As long as they pay their rent on time, I leave them alone." He felt obliged to explain his duties. "I just keep the boilers going, vacuum the hall runners, and collect the rent for the corporation. It pays my rent and a little extra. It's not much of a job, but I get along fine."

"Did you ever speak to Sharkey?" Ralph asked.

"Just to say hello if we passed in the hall or I happened to be sitting outside on the steps on a warm night and he came or went."

"Then you don't know what his job was? Or if he had a job, for that matter?"

"I think he must have had some kind of night work. I'd see him in the daytime when he'd come downstairs to check his mailbox, but then he'd go back up again. I noticed he left the building nights a lot though."

"Have you ever seen him with anyone else? Man? Woman?"

"Not that I remember. He seemed to be pretty much of a loner."

"Did anybody ever visit him in his apartment?"

"I wouldn't know. Once anybody walks in the front door he's got thirty places to go to and I don't know which one it is unless I follow him and I don't."

When we finished questioning him, Ralph and I walked to our car. When we got to headquarters, we went to Sergeant Brannigan in the fingerprint department.

He had been waiting for us. "We didn't have any trouble tracking down the fingerprints. They're on file locally and they belong to a man named Alfred Brown Carpenter. He got out of stir just about the same time as Sharkey." Brannigan consulted the folder on his desk. "His specialty is also burglary. He's used three aliases so far. David Email Frazier, George Henna Ingerson, and the last time he was caught, John Khaki Larson."

Ralph cocked his head. "Khaki?"

I chuckled. "Don't you see, Ralph, criminals like to play little indirect games with the police. It bolsters their egos. Our suspect's real name is Albert *Brown* Carpenter. And, as you can see, in each of his aliases, he used a color as his middle name."

They stared at the folder and Brannigan said, "Henna and Khaki, I'll accept. But Email?"

"A sickly greenish blue of low saturation and medium brilliance."

Ralph rubbed his jaw. "I see something else too. His real name is Alfred Brown Carpenter. ABC. His first alias was David Email Frazier. DEF. His second, George Henna Ingerson. GHI. And the third, John Khaki Larson. JKL. In other words, he's going through the alphabet."

I acknowledged Ralph's acuity. "So this time Carpenter is probably using an alias with the monogram MNO?" I fetched the

white-pages volume of our telephone book and found Sharkey's name, address, and telephone number listed. "Sharkey has occupied his apartment long enough to get his name in this book. I think it is fairly safe to assume that Carpenter also has a telephone. And given the hope that he too has remained in one spot long enough to be listed in the phone book, I think we may assume that his new alias is herein concealed behind the initials MNO."

Brannigan concurred. "Sure, but there must be thousands of MNO's."

I began paging. "There are thirty-four pages in this book containing last names beginning with the letter O. And on each page there are four columns containing approximately one hundred names each. Therefore we have approximately 13,600 people in our metropolitan area whose last names begin with the letter O."

I went to work with pen and paper. "And since the letter M is one-twenty-sixth of the alphabet, we would not be too far off to assume that approximately one-twenty-sixth of the first names of these people would begin with the letter M—which would give us, rounding off—about 500 people whose given names begin with the letter M and surnames with the letter O."

"Further utilizing the principle of one-twenty-sixth, we will find that only *twenty* of these 500 will also possess the middle initial N. And if we eliminate women and take into consideration that fact that half of the people in the phone book do not bother to list their middle initials—though I'm quite certain that Carpenter would, since he is so proud of his aliases—then I would not be at all surprised if we come up with no more than five people whose trio of initials are MNO."

I smiled. "Running a careful and patient finger down these thirty-four pages, I would estimate that it would take one person about three hours to check out the O's. Or two people, one and one-half hours. Or three, one hour. Or four—"

"I get the picture," Brannigan said. "I'll see how many bodies I can get working on it."

"Henry," Ralph said, "that was brilliant, but do you really expect Carpenter to be sitting in his apartment waiting for us to find and arrest him? He's probably halfway across the country by now."

"Very possibly, Ralph. However, you will recall that the cause of Sharkey's death was a single blow to the jaw and subsequent

slow internal cranial bleeding. Now if a man truly intended to kill another, wouldn't he choose a more efficient means? A gun, a knife, a heavy glass ashtray? A single blow to the jaw is very seldom lethal. Therefore, there exists a strong possibility that while Carpenter struck his partner, he does not know he killed him. When Carpenter left, Sharkey could very well have been still alive and breathing, although unconscious."

We left Brannigan and his men to begin their search of the phone book and continued on to the Robbery Division on the third floor.

I spoke to Sergeant Whitman. "Do you happen to have a jewel robbery in which at least one of the items stolen was a stone approximately the diameter of a nickel and perhaps a bit longer? And quite valuable?"

Whitman went to a filing cabinet and brought back a folder. "Here you are, Henry. Three weeks ago a diamond pendant was stolent from a Miss Vivian Patterson."

"Ah, yes," I said. "And the size of this stone?"

"It says here that it was a blue-white diamond, forty carats, and worth about eighty thousand dollars."

I nodded thoughtfully. "It might be just the thing I'm looking for. However, do you have anything else?"

"Not right now, Henry. High-class jewel robberies aren't all that common any more. This Patterson caper is the only thing we've got open. Only the diamond pendant was stolent. Nothing else as far as we know. It happened while this Vivian Patterson was on a crowded dance floor in her own home."

I grasped the picture immediately. "Someone surreptitiously snatched the pendant from her neck while she was preoccupied with dance and small talk and she didn't notice the loss until later?"

"That's the way it looks, Henry. She lives with her parents in one of those big places on Lake Drive."

I wrote down the address, sent word to Sergeant Brannigan where he could find us, and then Ralph and I drove to the lake shore. We took the sweeping drive past the estates fronting the water until we found the Patterson entrance. Once past the gateposts, we followed the wood-bordered driveway and finally came to a stop in the oval before a mansion of heroic proportions.

A maid answered the door and led us to a waiting room and then disappeared.

Five minutes later an auburn-haired, dark-eyed girl in her early twenties entered the room. "Sorry to keep you waiting. You are the police? Have you found my pendant yet?"

"No," I said. "However we are hot on the trail. We would like to go over everything which occurred on the night it was stolen."

"Again? Haven't you people gone over that all pretty thoroughly?"

"We are not from Robbery," I said. "We are Homicide. And we would like to hear for ourselves just what happened."

She was rather impressed. "How did homicide get into this?"

I smiled grimly. "We suspect a falling out among thieves. One of them is now dead."

"Oh? More than one person was involved in stealing my pendant?"

"It appears so. However, I am certain that we will have the surviving culprit in our custody within two hours, depending on how fast the men at headquarters can go through the O's in the phone book."

She studied me. "Two hours?"

"At the maximum. Now, please start at the beginning."

She nodded. "Okay. Well, it's called the Stele of Zevgolatio."

"What is?"

"The pendant. Or rather the stone itself. The diamond is flat-tish and rectangular, like a miniature tombstone. That accounts for the Stele. The Zevgolatio I've never been able to figure out."

"Ah, and this gem, possibly minus the chain, would just slip into an aspirin bottle?"

"I guess so. But why an aspirin bottle?"

I amended. "Actually it was not slipped into an aspirin bottle, though it could have been. Instead it was secreted inside an electric-light bulb."

She looked at Ralph. "Are you positive he works for the police department?"

Ralph looked out of a window. "Not only that, he outranks me."

She turned back to me. "Do you know who has my pendant now?"

"It is in the possession of a notorious breaking-and-entering man whose present initials are MNO. I haven't his exact address as yet." I rubbed my hands. "Now, I understand that this pendant was stolen some three weeks ago?"

"Yes. We were having a party. No special occasion. My parents

just like to give parties and I was dancing with Marvin Dotson, when suddenly he stared at my cleavage and said, 'Vivian, weren't you wearing your pendant a little while ago?' And I looked and I wasn't any more."

I nodded understandingly. "So while you were dancing and conversing gaily someone removed the necklace from your person. Did you know all of your guests?"

"Probably about eighty percent. It wasn't that formal a party that you needed an invitation. We just phoned around and people promised to come and asked if they couldn't bring somebody."

"Did you dance with anyone who was a total stranger to you?"

"Probably a half dozen."

I smiled. "There it is. Either MNO snatched the Stele of Zevgolatio while you were actually dancing with him, or possibly while he was dancing with somebody else he managed to jostle you and took that golden moment to steal the pendant. How many people were at this party?"

"About a hundred and fifty or so. I know there was always some waiting to get into the bathrooms. We spilled all over the place. The terrace, the swimming pool. Matt and Nellie Estes even played tennis, but then they always drink too much."

"After you discovered that your pendant was missing, you called the police?"

"Not right away. I thought that somehow the chain had broken and it had dropped to the floor. So we started looking for it."

"You and Marvin?"

"That's the way it started, but in a little while everybody was helping us to look, but we couldn't find a trace of the Stele of Zevgolatio. Finally more and more of us came to the conclusion that it had been stolen. So Dad finally got on a chair and asked if anybody would mind dreadfully if we called the police. Nobody objected, so we did. I think everybody was really thrilled. Being questioned by the police, you know. Better than party games—well, at least most party games. Some of the guests were genuinely disappointed because the police wouldn't fingerprint them. They just took down names, asked a few questions, and that seemed to be that."

"Do you know if any of your guests slipped off before the police arrived?"

"I suppose some of them could have. But it seemed to me that all of them stayed for the fun."

A maid came into the room. "There's a telephone call for a Sergeant Henry Turnbuckle."

Vivian indicated an extension phone on a side table and I picked it up.

It was Sergeant Brannigan. "Well, Henry, would you believe it, there are only four MNO's in the phone book, and three of them are women."

I laughed modestly. "As I predicted. And who is the man?"

"Merriweather Nile Olson."

"Nile? Ah, yes. As in green."

Brannigan gave me Olson's address and I put down the phone. "The noose is drawing ever tighter. Miss Patterson, you shall have your pendant shortly."

"You mentioned two hours?"

"And I shall be true to my word."

Ralph and I left her and drove to an east-side apartment building where we consulted the mailboxes in the foyer. We found a Merriweather Nile Olson listed for an apartment on the fourth floor.

We took the elevator up and pressed the buzzer beside door 417.

Our man, Alfred Brown Carpenter, currently Merriweather Nile Olson, opened the door. He was quite a hulking man in shirt sleeves, and a patch of surgical tape and gauze covered what appeared to be some damage to the side of his head.

A lifetime of experience seemed to make him instinctively suspect that we were the police and we quickly confirmed his suspicion.

He reluctantly allowed us into his apartment.

I came directly to the point. "Your partner Sharkey is dead."

His mouth dropped. "Sharkey dead?"

It was clear that Sharkey's death was a surprise to him. I pressed the attack. "There is no use denying it, Olson. You are responsible for his demise. That sneak blow to the jaw did it."

He blinked. "I didn't mean to kill him. Not on purpose. I just slugged him in self-defense."

I glanced about the room. Where would Olson hide the pendant? "Where is the Stele of Zevgolatio?"

He looked at me. "Huh?"

"It is called the Stele of Zevgolatio," I said. I spelled stele for him, but did not attempt Zevgolatio.

He looked at Ralph and shrugged.

"Very well," I said. "Since you are not ready to cooperate, then I am forced to find it myself and I have a fairly good idea of where you hid it."

I switched on the floor lamp. One of the bulbs appeared to be burned out. "Ah," I said, "what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, eh?"

I turned to Ralph. "You will notice that this bulb appears to be burned out, and there is a very good reason for that." I unscrewed the bulb, grasped the stem in one hand and the glass in the other, and exerted force in opposite directions.

The bulb exploded in my hands.

There was a silence while I examined my fingers. A few small shards of glass, yes, but not deeply imbedded. I was able to brush them out without drawing more than a drop or two of blood. I cleared my throat. "He is more clever than I thought, Ralph. The pendant was not in that bulb." I glowered at Olson. "All right now, we've had enough of your nonsense. Where is it?"

Olson's mind still seemed befogged by the news of Sharkey's death. He reached absently into his shirt pocket and brought forth a small object. He handed it to Ralph.

I leaned forward. "What is that?"

"Microfilm," Ralph said.

The room seemed a bit warm. I stared aggressively at the small roll. "Actually, Ralph, that is *not* microfilm. Definitely *not* microfilm. Offhand, I would say that it is just an ordinary, general, run-of-the-mill strip of negative from a small camera."

Ralph took the rubber band off the roll and held the film up to the light.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "In the event of a threatened atomic attack the entire population of Milwaukee will be evacuated to Sheboygan."

I frowned. Sheboygan?

Ralph replaced the rubber band on the negatives and rubbed at his mouth for a few seconds. "Actually, Henry, I really couldn't make out a damn thing. What is supposed to be on this film, Olson?"

Olson shrugged. "I couldn't see anything either. All I know is that the film is worth five thousand bucks to somebody." He handed us a folded newspaper.

I read aloud the item in the Lost and Found section which had been encircled by ink.

Would like to contact the gentleman or gentlemen who accidentally removed the statuette of the six-armed East Indian goddess from my residence on the night of the 22nd. Would like its return. Keep the other things. Four-figure reward. No questions asked. 563-2740.

Olson began his story. "Two nights ago Sharkey and me pulled this little job in the suburbs. You know how it is, you take what you can turn over for a fast buck. You don't waste time with junk. But at the same time every once in a while, you see something that draws your interest, so you take it along just for the hell of it. And that's what Sharkey done with this statuette which has six arms and a ashtray built into its lap.

"We dropped off all of the stuff we accumulated at this garage we rent for just such purposes, and then I drove Sharkey to his apartment, him still holding on to the statuette.

"Well, in this morning's newspaper I saw that item. And I know it's referring to us, because how many East Indian goddesses with six arms disappear in a week?

"So this loser doesn't care about the TV set, the stereo, and the typewriters we took from his place, he just wants the statuette back and he's willing to pay four figures for it. But why? It's just a chalk thing and I never heard of no valuable antique with a ashtray in its lap.

"First I think, is this some kind of a trap? While I'm making the phone call, are the cops tracing the number? But on the other hand, this 'four figures' was tempting, so I went down to the railroad station where they got this bank of ten phones, and I called the number and also kept an eye out in case I suddenly saw cops.

"I made the connection and the man who answers tells me I can keep the TV and other stuff, all he's interested in is the statuette. And he'll give me one thousand bucks for it.

"Since I wasn't born yesterday, I know that there's got to be more to it—including money—than shows on the surface. So I tell him I want more money. We haggle and finally he won't go no higher than five thousand.

"So I take a chance and say 'Suppose I give you the statuette, but keep what I found *inside* it.'

"There's quiet on the line for a few seconds and then he says, 'You found the film?'

"Naturally I pick it up fast and say, 'That's right, I found the film. And I think it's worth more than five thousand dollars.'

"And he says, 'Maybe. But not to you. You wouldn't know where to peddle it. Five thousand is my limit. If I really have to, I can take the pictures again.'

"So I settle for the five thousand dollars and I'm supposed to meet him at four o'clock in the lobby of the main library downtown. I'll recognize him because he'll have a Smile button in his lapel.

"Well, I drive over to Sharkey's place, tell him about the newspaper item, and ask where's the statuette.

"He looks at me innocent and says, 'I tossed it down the incinerator. I thought it was just a bunch of junk.'

"But I seen that blue-eyed expression on him before and I know he's lying—especially when I look down at the wastepaper basket and there is one of those arms peeking out from under a crumpled newspaper.

"So I picked up the goddess and on the bottom I noticed this hole. It's empty now, but the film must have been in there and sealed over with plaster which was a slightly different color from the rest of the base."

Ralph interrupted. "Sharkey also saw the ad and wondered why the statuette would be worth four figures? He examined it and dug out the hole and found the film? Did he also call the phone number in the ad?"

"I don't think so—at least, not before I did or my contact would have mentioned it for sure. No, I think Sharkey wanted to find out how valuable the film really was before he did any dickering. He was probably going to get prints made, but in the meantime he decided to hide the film, just in case I got wise."

Olson sighed. "I could see that arguing with Sharkey wasn't going to get me anywhere, so I began taking the place apart, doing it slow and not making so much noise that the neighbors might call the police. Sharkey didn't like it, but he wasn't going to call the police to stop me either. I was just about ready to give up, when I thought about the light bulbs. And I was on the right track too because when I start breaking them, Sharkey comes at me with the statuette and breaks it over my head. In self-defense I had to slug him. But I thought he was just knocked out. When I found the film and left, he was still laying there and breathing."

Ralph and I took Olson to headquarters for booking. We turned the negatives over to the photograph department for processing and then drove downtown to the library, arriving there at 3:40.

We began our wait for Olson's contact by inconspicuously studying a butterfly collection under glass in the vaulted lobby.

At five minutes to four Ralph dragged my attention from a Long-tailed Skipper (*Eudamus proteus*). "There's our man, just coming in the door."

He proved to be a thin worried-looking man wearing the Smile button in his left lapel.

Ralph and I approached him. "We are police officers," I said. "Are you 563-2740?"

He paled and seemed about to collapse.

I pressed on. "We have put together the whole sordid tale of the mysterious East Indian goddess, the concealed film, and Murder Two."

He swallowed. "Murder? I wouldn't have anything at all to do with anything that involves murder. I'm just an ordinary average spy."

A vision of Sheboygan flashed before my eyes, but then I pulled myself together. "We know all there is to know about this transaction—except for an insignificant interstice here and there. You might as well unburden yourself and tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It will go much easier for you if you do."

He was thoroughly rattled and ready to talk. "My name is Leander Morgan and my boss is Mr. Erickson, of Erickson Snowmobile. I infiltrated Hollister Snowmobile last March."

"Just one second," Ralph said. "Just what kind of a spy are you?"

Morgan blinked. "An industrial spy, of course. What else did you think?"

Ralph rubbed his neck. "Keep talking."

Morgan did. "As you know, snowmobiling has grown fantastically in the last few years. It is changing the face of the nation, especially in winter. Along with it, the competition between manufacturers for the market is becoming keener and keener and it certainly helps a company to know what its competitors are up to. That's why Mr. Erickson had me infiltrate Hollister Snowmobile, our bitterest rival in this area. I got a job as a draftsman, though I'm really an engineer and know what to look for."

"And the film?" Ralph asked.

"It contains the full plans for the new Hollister Sting Hornet coming out next year. It features a new torque reaction slide sus-

pension, a revolutionary fuel injection system, and a pull-out kidney belt. With that information Mr. Erickson will be ready to match Hollister's Sting Hornet when it begins coming off the assembly line."

We took Morgan down to headquarters, leaving it to the District Attorney's office to figure out whether there really was any law against industrial spying and if there was, did we have anything besides Morgan's confession—which he would probably repudiate as soon as Erickson Snowmobile got him a lawyer.

Ralph and I went upstairs to our desk, preparatory to checking out for the day.

The phone rang and I picked it up.

It was Vivian Patterson. "The two hours are up. Where is my Stele of Zevgolatio?"

I cleared my throat. "Unfortunately, through a set of fortuitous circumstances, I have not yet been able to recover it."

"But you took a sacred oath on your badge."

"I don't quite remember it that way."

"It was implied. Now the very least you can do to salvage the honor and word of the police department is to come over here and ask me more questions."

"But I am Homicide. Not Robbery. And the crime of murder has been disengaged from the disappearance of your pendant."

"I'll expect to see you in half an hour," she said, and hung up.

Ralph had, as is usual, been listening on the extension. "Henry, she's right. You can't just cruelly abandon the Stele of Zevgolatio."

"But I'm off-duty."

"Henry, a good policeman is not a clock watcher."

Ralph went home to his wife, children, and supper, while I drove to the Patterson mansion.

Vivian Patterson met me at the door, smiling.

I got immediately to business. "Now we know that you first noticed that the Stele of Zevgolatio was missing while you were on the dance floor. However, that might not be the spot at which it was stolen. When was the last time you remember still having it on?"

She gave it thought. "I was sitting in one of those chairs beside the swimming pool when Mavis Hutchinson oohed and aahed over it a little."

Vivian led me through the house and to the poolside tables,

hairs, and umbrellas. "I was sitting right there."

I nodded. "Between the time when you are positive you had the pendant and the time when you first noticed it was missing, was there any incident, any diversion, which might have captured your attention and that of those about you so that the thief could snatch the necklace from your throat?"

"Well, Freddie Kaltenberg fell into the swimming pool. He can't swim, but it was no tragedy, because I could just reach over and pull him out."

"Ah," I said. "Mr. Kaltenberg fell into this pool and you bent over, offered him a hand, and pulled him up and out?"

"I know just what you're thinking. While I was pulling him out he snatched the Stele of Zevgolatio? But that's nonsense. Freddie's parents are Kaltenberg Breweries and he gets a fabulous allowance."

I stared down at the ten feet or more of water, but could make out nothing, refraction being what it is. "Do you have a pair of swimming trunks I could borrow?"

When I was properly attired for the water, I returned to the pool and jumped into it feet first at the point where Freddie Kaltenberg had fallen into the water.

I plunged to the bottom and almost immediately stepped on a stone and an exceedingly fine chain. I stooped, picked them up, and burst triumphantly to the surface with the Stele of Zevgolatio.

"Just as I suspected," I said. "While you were lending this Kaltenberg a life-saving hand, he, in his thrashing panic, somehow pulled the pendant from your throat and it dropped to the bottom of the pool unbeknown either to you or him." I handed her the pendant. "Madam, the case is closed."

She studied the stone and then me—equally it seemed. Then she moved to the edge of the pool and dropped the Stele of Zevgolatio back into the water at the point where I had recovered it.

I frowned. "Now, why did you do that?"

She smiled. "Actually this case is not closed. It is just beginning and Freddie is the thief."

I rubbed my jaw. "But with all that money, why would he want—"

"I've always suspected that Freddie is a closet kleptomaniac. His eyebrows join. Don't you see how fiendishly clever he's been?"

"No."

"First of all he created the diversion by deliberately falling into the pool practically at my side."

"But if he can't swim, didn't he risk drowning?"

"Bah. He couldn't possibly have drowned with all those people about and he craftily knew it. And while I was lending him a hand and sympathizing with his gasping for air, he chose that moment to snatch the pendant from my neck and let it drop to the bottom of the pool."

"Why would he do that?"

"Because to keep it on his person was too dangerous. If the police searched him, they would surely find it. No, the ideal place to hide the Stele of Zevgolatio was at the bottom of ten feet of wavy blue water where it was invisible. And so now Freddie is biding his time, and one day he will return to the scene of the crime, dive into the pool, and retrieve his loot."

"But if he can't swim, how could he dive into—"

"At this moment I just *know* that he's secretly learning how to swim. I'm psychic about things like that. What we've got to do is remain alert. On our toes. We've got to watch Freddie and this swimming pool whenever they are contiguous. We've got to catch this master jewel thief with the goods on his person."

So far Vivian's invited me to her home to watch Freddie twice and three times when he failed to show up.

I wonder if he suspects a trap?

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a **NEW** novelet by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

How would you like it if every time you took a shower a Peeping Tom grinned through your bathroom window? And nearly every time you went out to the street a "feeler," a pincher, sidled close to you? Well, strange things can happen in Rome these days, in this instance to the wife of a rising young government official. . .

WHEN IN ROME

by **PATRICIA HIGHSMITH**

Isabella had soaped her face, her neck, and was beginning to relax in the spray of deliciously warm water on her body when suddenly—there he was again! An ugly grinning face peered at her not a meter from her own face, with one big fist gripping an iron bar, so he could raise himself to her level.

"Swine!" Isabella said between her teeth, ducking at the same time.

"Slut!" came his retort. "Ha, ha!"

This must have been the third intrusion by the same creep! Isabella, still stooped, got out of the shower and reached for the plastic bottle of yellow shampoo, shot some into a bowl which held a cake of soap (she removed the soap), let some hot shower water run into the bowl and agitated the water until the suds rose, thick and sweet-smelling. She set the bowl within easy reach on the rim of the tub, and climbed back under the shower, breathing harder with her fury.

Just let him try it again! Defiantly erect, she soaped her face-cloth, washed her thighs. The square recessed window was just to the left of her head, and there was a square emptiness, stone-lined, between the blue-and-white tiled bathroom walls and the

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great iron bars, each as thick as her wrist, on the street side.

"Signora?" came the mocking voice again.

Isabella reached for the bowl. Now he had both hands on the bars, and his face was between them, unshaven, his black eyes intense, his loose mouth smiling. Isabella flung the suds, holding the bowl with fingers spread wide on its underside.

"Oof!" The head disappeared.

A direct hit! The suds had caught him between the eyes, and she thought she heard some of the suds hit the pavement. Isabella smiled and finished her shower.

She was not looking forward to the evening—dinner at home with the First Secretary of the Danish Embassy with his girl friend; but she had had worse evenings in the past, and there were worse to come in Vienna in the last week of this month May, when her husband Filippo had to attend some kind of human-rights-and-pollution conference that was going to last five days. Isabella didn't care for the Viennese—she considered the women bores with nothing on their minds but clothes, who was wearing what, and how much did it cost.

"I think I prefer the green silk tonight," Isabella said to her maid Elisabetta, when she went into her bedroom, big bath towel around her, and saw the new black dress laid out on her bed. "I changed my mind," Isabella added, because she remembered that she had chosen the black that afternoon. Hadn't she? Isabella felt a little vague.

"And which shoes, signora?"

Isabella told her.

A quarter to eight now. The guests—two men, Filippo had said, besides the Danish secretary who was called Osterberg or Ottenberg, were not due until eight, which meant eight thirty or later. Isabella wanted to go out on the street, to drink an espresso standing up at the bar, like any other ordinary Roman citizen, and she also wanted to see if the Peeping Tom was still hanging around. In fact, there were two of them, the second a weedy type of about 30 who wore a limp raincoat and dark glasses. He was a "feeler," the kind who pushed his hand against a woman's bottom. He had done it to Isabella once or twice while she was waiting for the porter to open the door. Isabella had to wait for the porter unless she chose to carry around a key as long as a man's foot for the big outside doors. The feeler looked a bit cleaner than her bathroom snoop, but he also seemed creepier and he never smiled.

"Going out for a caffè," Isabella said to Elisabetta.

"You prefer to go out?" Elisabetta said, meaning that she could make a caffè, if the signora wanted. Elisabetta was forty-odd, her hair in a neat bun. Her husband had died a year ago, and she was still in a state of semi-mourning.

Isabella flung a cape over her shoulders, barely nodded, and left. She crossed the cobbled court whose stones slanted gently toward a center drain, and was met at the door by one of the three porters who kept a round-the-clock guard on the palazzo which was occupied by six affluent tenants. This porter was Franco. He lifted the heavy crossbar and opened the big doors enough for her to pass through.

Isabella was out on the street. Freedom! She stood tall and breathed. An adolescent boy cycled past, whistling. An old woman in black waddled by slowly, burdened with a shopping bag that showed onions and spaghetti on top, carelessly wrapped in newspaper. Someone's radio blared jazz through an open window. The air promised a hot summer.

Isabella looked around, but didn't see either of her nuisances, and was aware of feeling slightly disappointed. However, there was the bar-café across the street and a bit to the right. Isabella entered, conscious that her fine clothes and well-groomed hair set her apart from the usual patrons here. She put on a warm smile for the young barman who knew her by now.

"Signora! Buon' giorno! A fine day, no? What is your wish?"

"Un espress', per piacere."

Isabella realized that she was known in the neighborhood as the wife of a government official who was reasonably important for his age which was still under 40, aware that she was considered rather rich, and pretty too. The latter, people could see. And what else, Isabella wondered as she sipped her espresso. She and Filippo had a fourteen-year-old daughter in school in Switzerland now. Susanna.

Isabella wrote to her faithfully once a week, as Susanna did to her. How was Susanna going to shape up? Would she even *like* her daughter by the time she was 18 or 22? Was Susanna going to lose her passion for horses and horseback riding (Isabella hoped so) and go for something more intellectual such as geology and anthropology, which she had shown an interest in last year? Or was she going to go the usual way—get married at 20 before she'd finished university, trade on her good looks and marry "the right

kind of man" before she had found out what life was all about? What *was* life all about?

Isabella looked around her, as if to find out. Isabella had had two years of university in Milan, had come from a rather intellectual family, and didn't consider herself just another dumb wife. Filippo was good-looking and had a promising career ahead of him. But then Filippo's *father* was important in a government ministry, and had money. The only trouble was that the wife of a man in diplomatic service had to be a clothes-horse, had to keep her mouth shut when she would like to open it, had to be polite and gracious to people whom she detested or was bored by. There were times when Isabella wanted to kick it all, to go slumming, simply to laugh.

She tossed off the last of her coffee, left a five-hundred-lire piece, and turned around, not yet leaving the security of the bar's counter. She surveyed the scene. Two tables were occupied by couples who might be lovers. A blind beggar with a white cane was on his way in.

And here came her dark-eyed Peeping Tom! Isabella was aware that her eyes lit up as if she beheld her lover walking in.

He grinned. He sauntered, swaggered slightly as he headed for the bar to a place at a little distance from her. He looked her up and down, like a man sizing up a pick-up before deciding yes or no.

Isabella lifted her head and walked out of the bar-café.

He followed. "You are beautiful, signora," he said. "I should know, don't you think so?"

"You can keep your filthy ideas to yourself!" Isabella replied as she crossed the street.

"My beautiful lady-love—the wife of my dreams!"

Isabella noticed that his eyes looked pink. Good! She pressed the bell for the porter. An approaching figure on her left caught her eye. The bottom-pincher, the gooser, the real oddball! Rain-coat again, no glasses today, a faint smile. Isabella turned to face him, with her back to the big doors.

"Oh, how I would like to. . . ." the feeler murmured as he passed her, so close she imagined she could feel the warmth of his breath against her cheek, and at the same time he slapped her hip with his left hand. He had a pockmark or two, and big cheekbones that stuck out gauntly. Disgusting type! And a disgusting phrase he had used!

From across the street, Peeping Tom was watching, Isabella saw; he was chuckling silently, rocking back on his heels.

Franco opened the doors. What if she told Filippo about those two? But of course she had, Isabella remembered, a month or so ago, yes. "How would *you* like it if a psychopath stared at you nearly every time you took a shower?" Isabella had said to Filippo, and he had broken out in one of his rare laughs. "If it were a *woman* maybe, yes, I might like it!" he said, then he had said that she shouldn't take it so seriously, that he would speak to the porters, or something like that.

Isabella had the feeling that she didn't really wake up until after the dinner party, when the coffee was served in the living room. The taste of the coffee reminded her of the bar that afternoon, of the dark-haired Peeping Tom with the pink eyes walking into the bar and having the nerve to speak to her *again*!

"We shall be in Vienna too, at the end of the month," said the girl friend of the Danish First Secretary.

Isabella rather liked her. Her name was Gudrun. She looked healthy, honest, unsnobbish. But Isabella had nothing to say except, "Good. We shall be looking forward," one of the phrases that came out of her automatically after 15 years of being the wife-of-a-government-employee. There were moments, hours, when she felt bored to the point of going insane. Like now. She felt on the brink of doing something shocking, such as standing up and screaming, or announcing that she wanted to go out for a walk (yes, and have another espresso in the same crummy bar), of shouting that she was bored with them *all*, even Filippo, slumped with legs crossed in an armchair now, wearing his neat, new dinner suit with a ruffled shirt, deep in conversation with the three other men. Filippo was long and lean like a fashion model, his black hair beginning to gray at the temples in a distinguished way. Women liked his looks, Isabella knew. His good looks, however, didn't make him a ball of fire as a lover. Did the women know that, Isabella wondered.

Before going to bed that night, Isabella had to check the shopping list with Luigi the cook for tomorrow's dinner party, because Luigi would be up early to buy fresh fish. Hadn't the signora suggested fish? And Luigi recommended young lamb instead of tournedos for the main course, if he dared say so.

Filippo paid her a compliment as he was undressing. "Osterberg thought you were charming."

They both slept in the same big bed, but it was so wide that Filippo could switch his reading light on and read his papers and briefings till all hours, as he often did, without disturbing Isabella.

A couple of evenings later Isabella was showering just before seven p.m. when the same dark-haired creep sprang up at her bathroom window, leering a "Hello, beautiful! Getting ready for me?"

Isabella was not in a mood for repartée. She got out of the shower.

"Ah, signora, such beauty should not be hidden! Don't try—"

"I've told the *police* about you!" Isabella yelled back at him, and switched off the bathroom light.

Isabella spoke to Filippo that evening as soon as he came in. "Something's got to be done—opaque glass put in the window—"

"You said that would make the bathroom too humid."

"I don't care! It's revolting! I've told the porters—Giorgio, anyway. He doesn't do a damned thing, that's plain!—Filippo?"

"Yes, my dear. Come on, can't we talk about this later? I've got to change my shirt, at least, because we're due—already." He looked at his watch.

Isabella was dressed. "I want your tear-gas gun. You remember you showed it to me. Where is it?"

Filippo sighed. "Top drawer, left side of my desk."

Isabella went to the desk in Filippo's study. The tear-gas gun looked like a fountain pen, only a bit thicker. Isabella smiled as she placed her thumb on the firing end of it and imagined her counterattack.

"Be careful how you use that tear-gas," Filippo said as they were leaving the house. "I don't want you to get into trouble with the police just because of a——"

"Me in trouble with the police! Whose side are you on?" Isabella laughed, and felt much better now that she was armed.

The next afternoon around five, Isabella went out, paid a visit to the pharmacy where she bought tissues and a bottle of a new eau de Cologne which the chemist suggested, and whose packaging amused her. Then she strolled toward the bar-café, keeping an eye out for her snoops as she went. She was bareheaded, had a bit of rouge on her lips, and she wore a new summer frock. She looked pretty and was aware of it. And across the street, walking past her very door now, went the raincoated creep in dark glasses

again—and he didn't notice her. Isabella felt slightly disappointed. She went into the bar and ordered an espresso, lit a rare cigarette.

The barman chatted. "Wasn't it a nice day? And the signora is looking especially well today."

Isabella barely heard him, but she replied politely. When she opened her handbag to pay for her espresso, she touched the tear-gas gun, picked it up, dropped it, before reaching for her purse.

"Grazie, signora!"

She had tipped generously as usual.

Just as she turned to the door, the bathroom peeper—her special persecutor—entered, and had the audacity to smile broadly and nod, as if they were dear friends. Isabella lifted her head higher as if with disdain, and at the same time gave him an appraising glance, which just might have been mistaken for an invitation, Isabella knew. She had meant it that way. The creep hadn't quite the boldness to say anything to her inside the caffè, but he did follow her out the door. Isabella avoided looking directly at him. Even his shoes were unshined. What could he do for a living, she wondered.

Isabella pretended, at her door, to be groping for her key. She picked up the tear-gas gun, pushed off its safety, and held it with her thumb against its top.

Then he said, with such mirth in his voice that he could hardly get the words out, "Bellissima signora, when are you going to let me—"

Isabella lifted the big fountain pen and pushed its firing button, maneuvering it so that its spray caught both his eyes at short range.

"Ow!— Ooh-h!" He coughed, then groaned, down on one knee now, with a hand across his eyes.

Even Isabella could smell the stuff, and blinked, her eyes watering. A man on the pavement had noticed the Peeping Tom struggling to get up, but was not running to help him, merely walking toward him. And now a porter opened the big wooden doors, and Isabella ducked into her own courtyard. "Thank you, Giorgio."

The next morning she and Filippo set out for Vienna. This excursion was one Isabella dreaded. Vienna would be dead after eleven thirty at night—not even an interesting coffee house would

be open. Awful! But the fact that she had fired a shot in self-defense—in attack—buoyed Isabella's morale.

And to crown her satisfaction she had the pleasure of seeing Peeping Tom in dark glasses as she and Filippo were getting into the chauffeured government car to be driven to the airport. The figure in dark glasses had stopped on the pavement some ten meters away to gaze at the luggage being put into the limousine by the liveried driver.

Isabella hoped his eyes were killing him. She had noted there was a box of four cartridges for the tear-gas gun in the same drawer. She intended to keep her gadget well charged. Surely the fellow wasn't going to come back for more! She might try it also on the feeler in the dirty raincoat. Yes, there was one who didn't mind approaching damned close!

"Why're you dawdling, Isabella? Forget something?" Filippo asked, holding the car door for her.

Isabella hadn't realized that she had been standing on the pavement, relishing the fact that the creep could see her about to get into the protective armor of the shiny car, about to go hundreds of kilometers away from him. "I'm ready," she said, and got in. She was not going to say to Filippo, "There's my Peeping Tom." She liked the idea of her secret war with him. Maybe his eyes were permanently damaged. She hoped so.

This minor coup made Vienna seem better. Isabella missed Elisabetta—some women whose husbands were in government service traveled with their maids, but Filippo was against this, just now. "Wait a couple of years till I get a promotion," Filippo had said. Years. Isabella didn't care for the word year or years. Could she stand it? At the stuffy dinner parties where the Austrians spoke bad French or worse Italian, Isabella carried her tear-gas gun in her handbag, even in her small evening bag at the big gala at the Staatsoper. *The Flying Dutchman*. Isabella sat with legs crossed, feet crossed also with tension, and dreamed of resuming her attack when she got back to Rome.

Then on the last evening Filippo had an "all-night meeting" with four men of the human-rights committee, or whatever they called it. Isabella expected him back at the hotel about three in the morning at the latest, but he did not get back till seven thirty, looking exhausted and even a bit drunk. His arrival had awakened her, though he had tried to come in quietly with his own key.

"Nothing at all," he said unnecessarily and a little vaguely. "Got to take a shower—then a little sleep. No appointment till—eleven this morning and it won't matter if I'm late." He ran the shower.

Then Isabella remembered the girl he had been talking to that evening, as he smoked a fine cigar—at least, Isabella had heard Filippo call it "a fine cigar"—a smiling, blonde Austrian girl, smiling in the special way women had when they wanted to say, "Anything you do is all right with me. I'm yours, you understand? At least for tonight."

Isabella sighed, turned over in bed, tried to sleep again, but she felt tense with rage, and knew she would not sleep before it was time for breakfast, time to get up. Damn it! She knew Filippo had been at the girl's apartment or in her hotel room, knew that if she took the trouble to sniff his shirt, even the shoulders of his dinner jacket, she would smell the girl's perfume—and the idea of doing that revolted her. Well, she herself had had two, no three lovers during her married life with Filippo, but they had been so brief, those affairs! And so discreet! Not one servant had known.

Isabella also suspected Filippo of having a girl friend in Rome, Sibilla, a rather gypsy-like brunette, and if Filippo was "discreet," it was because he was only lukewarm about her. This blonde tonight was more Filippo's type, Isabella knew. She heard Filippo hit the twin bed that was pushed close to her bed. He would sleep like a log, then get up in three hours looking amazingly fresh.

When Isabella and Filippo got back to Rome, Signor Sore-Eyes was on hand the very first evening, when Isabella stood under the shower about seven thirty in the evening. Now that was fidelity for you! Isabella ducked, giggling. Her giggle was audible.

And Sore-Eyes' response came instantly: "Ah, the lady of my heart is pleased! She laughs!" He had dropped to his feet, out of sight, but his voice came clearly through the stone recess. "Come, let me see more. *More!*" Hands grasped the bars; the grinning face appeared, black eyes shining and looking not at all damaged.

"Get lost!" she shouted, and stepped out of the shower and began to dry herself, standing near the wall, out of his view.

But the other nut, the feeler, seemed to have left the neighborhood. At least Isabella did not see him during three or four days after her return from Vienna. Nearly every day she had an espresso at the bar-café across the street, and sometimes twice a day she took taxis to the Via Veneto area where a few of her

friends lived, or to the Via Condotti for shopping. Shiny-Eyes remained faithful, however, not always in view when she came out of her big doors, but more often than not.

Isabella fancied—she liked to fancy—that he was in love with her, even though his silly remarks were intended either to make her laugh or, she had to admit it, to insult and shock her. It was this line of thinking, however, which caused Isabella to see the Peeping Tom as a rival, and which gave her an idea. What Filippo needed was a good jolt!

"Would you like to come for after-dinner coffee tonight?" Isabella murmured to Shiny-Eyes one day, interrupting his own stream of vulgarity, as she stood not yet pushing the bell of her house.

The man's mouth fell open, revealing more of his stained teeth.

"Ghiardini," she said, giving her last name. "Ten thirty." She had pushed the bell by now and the doors were opening. "Wear some better clothes," she whispered.

That evening Isabella dressed with a little more interest in her appearance. She and Filippo had to go out first to a "buffet cocktail" at the Hotel Eliseo. Isabella was not even interested in what country was host to the affair. Then she and Filippo departed at ten fifteen in their own government car, to be followed by two other groups of Americans, Italians, and a couple of Germans. Isabella and Filippo were earlier than the rest, and of course Luigi and Elisabetta already had the long bar-table well equipped with bottles, glasses, and ice, and platters of little sausages stuck with toothpicks. Why hadn't she told Shiny-Eyes eleven o'clock?

But Shiny-Eyes did the right thing, and arrived just after eleven. Isabella's heart gave a dip as he entered through the living-room door, which had been opened by Luigi. The room was already crowded with guests, most of them standing up with drinks, chattering away, quite occupied, and giving Shiny-Eyes not a glance. Luigi was seeing to his drink. At least he was wearing a dark suit, a limp but white shirt, and a tie.

Isabella chatted with a large American and his wife. Isabella hated speaking English, but she could hold her own in it. Filippo, Isabella saw, had left his quartet of diplomats and was now concentrating on two pretty women; he was standing before them while they sat on the sofa, as if mesmerizing them by his tall elegant presence, his stream of bilge. The women were German, secretaries or girl friends. Isabella almost sneered.

Shiny-Eyes was nursing his Scotch against the wall by the bar-table, and Isabella drifted over on the pretense of replenishing her champagne. She glanced at him, and he came closer. To Isabella he seemed the only vital person in the room. She had no intention of speaking to him, even of looking directly at him, and concentrated on pouring champagne from a small bottle.

"Good evening, signora," he said in English.

"Good evening. And what is your name?" she asked in Italian.

"Ugo."

Isabella turned gracefully on her heel and walked away. For the next minutes she was a dutiful hostess, circulating, chatting, making sure that everyone had what he or she wanted. People were relaxing, laughing more loudly. Even as she spoke to someone, Isabella looked in Ugo's direction and saw him in the act of pocketing a small Etruscan statue. Isabella drifted slowly but directly across the room toward Ugo.

"You put that back!" she said between her teeth, and left him.

Ugo put it back, flustered, but not seriously.

Filippo had caught the end of this, Isabella speaking to Ugo.

Filippo rose to find a new drink, got it, and approached Isabella.

"Who's the dark type over there? Do you know him?"

Isabella shrugged. "Someone's bodyguard, perhaps?"

The evening ended quietly, Ugo slipping out unnoticed even by Isabella. When Isabella turned back to the living room expecting to see Filippo, she found the room empty. "Filippo?" she called, thinking he might be in the bedroom.

Filippo had evidently gone out with some of the guests, and Isabella was sure he was going to see one of the blondes tonight. Isabella helped herself to a last champagne, something she rarely did. She was not satisfied with the evening after all.

When she awakened the next morning, at the knock of Elisabetta with the breakfast tray, Filippo was not beside her in bed. Elisabetta, of course, made no comment. While Isabella was still drinking caffè latte, Filippo arrived. All-night talk with the Americans, he explained, and now he had to change his clothes.

"Is the blonde in the blue dress American? I thought she and the other blonde were Germans," Isabella said.

Now the row was on. So what, was Filippo's attitude.

"What kind of life is it for *me*?" Isabella screamed. "Am I nothing but an *object*? Just some female figure in the house—always here, to say buona sera—and smile!"

"Where would I be without you? Every man in government service needs a wife," replied Filippo, using up the last of his patience. "And you're a very good hostess, Isabella, really!"

Isabella roared like a lioness. "Hostess! I detest the word! And your girl friends—in this house—"

"Never!" Filippo replied proudly.

"Two of them! How many have you now?"

"Am I the only man in Rome with a mistress or two?" He had recovered his cool and intended to stand up for his rights. After all, he was supporting Isabella and in fine style, and their daughter Susanna too. "If you don't like it—" But Filippo stopped.

More than ever, that day, Isabella wanted to see Ugo. She went out around noon, and stopped for an americano at the little barcaffè. This time she sat at a table. Ugo came in when she had nearly finished her drink. Faithful, he was. Or psychic. Maybe both. Without looking at him, she knew that he had seen her.

She left some money on the table and walked out. Ugo followed. She walked in an opposite direction from the palazzo across the street, knowing that he knew she expected him to follow her.

When they were safely around another corner, Isabella turned. "You did quite well last night, except for the attempted—"

"Ah, sorry, signora!" he interrupted, grinning.

"What are you by profession—if I dare to ask?"

"Journalist, sometimes. Photographer. You know, a free-lance."

"Would you like to make some money?"

He wriggled, and grinned more widely. "To spend on you, signora, yes."

"Never mind the rubbish." He really was an untidy specimen, back in his old shoes again, dirty sweater under his jacket, and when had he last had a bath? Isabella looked around to see if anyone might be observing them. "Would you be interested in kidnaping a rich man?"

Ugo hesitated only two seconds. "Why not?" His black eyebrows had gone up. "Tell me. Who?"

"My husband. You will need a friend with a gun and a car."

Ugo indulged in another grin, but his attitude was attentive.

Isabella had thought out her plans that morning. She told Ugo that she and Filippo wanted to buy a house outside of Rome, and she had the names of a few real-estate agents. She could make an appointment with one for Friday morning, for instance, at nine o'clock. Isabella said she would make herself "indisposed" that

morning, so Filippo would have to go alone. But Ugo must be at the palazzo with a car a little before nine.

"I must make the hour the same, otherwise Filippo will suspect me," Isabella explained. "These agents are always a little late. You should be ten minutes early. I'll see that Filippo is ready."

Isabella continued, and walked slowly, since she felt it made them less conspicuous than if they stood still. If Ugo and his friend could camp out somewhere overnight with Filippo, until she had time to get a message from them and get the money from the government? If Ugo could communicate by telephone or entrust someone to deliver a written message? Either way was easy, Ugo said. He might have to hit Filippo on the head, Isabella said, but Ugo was not to hurt him seriously. Ugo understood.

A few moments later, when they parted, everything was worked out for the kidnaping on Friday morning. Tomorrow was Thursday, and if Ugo had spoken to his friend and all was well, he was to give Isabella a nod, merely, tomorrow afternoon about five when she would go out for an espresso.

Isabella was so exhilarated she went that afternoon to see her friend Margherita who lived off the Via Veneto. Margherita asked her if she had found a new lover. Isabella laughed.

"No, but I think Filippo has," Isabella replied.

Filippo also noticed, by Thursday afternoon, that she was in a merry mood. Filippo was home Thursday evening after their dinner out at a restaurant where they had been two at a table of 20. Isabella took off her shoes and waltzed in the living room. Filippo was aware of his early date with the real-estate agents, and cursed it. It was already after midnight.

The next morning Elisabetta awakened them with the breakfast tray at eight thirty, and Isabella complained of a headache.

"No use in my going if you're not going," Filippo said.

"You can at least tell if the house is possible—or houses," she replied sleepily. "Don't let them down or they won't make a date with us again."

Filippo got dressed.

Isabella heard the faint ring of the street-door bell. Filippo went out. By this time he was in the living room or the kitchen in quest of more coffee. It was two minutes to nine. Isabella at once got up, flung on a blouse, slacks and sandals, ready to meet the real-estate agents who she supposed would be twenty minutes late, at least.

They were. Elisabetta announced them. Two gentlemen. The porter had let them into the court. All seemed to be going well which was to say Filippo was not in view.

"But I thought my husband had already left with you!" She explained that her husband had left the house half an hour ago "I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me. I have a migraine to day."

The agency men expressed disappointment, but left in good humor finally, because the Ghiardinis were potentially good clients, and Isabella promised to telephone them in the near future.

Isabella went out for a pre-lunch cinzano, and felt reassured by the absence of Ugo. She was about to answer a letter from Susanna which had come that morning when the telephone rang. It was Filippo's colleague Vicente, and where was Filippo? Filippo was supposed to have arrived at noon at Vicente's office for a talk before they went out to lunch with a man who Vicente said was "important."

"This morning was a little strange," Isabella said casually, with a smile in her voice, "because Filippo went off with some estate agents at nine, I thought, then—"

"Then?"

"Well, I don't know. I haven't heard from him since," Isabella replied, thinking she had said quite enough. "I don't know anything about his appointments today."

Isabella went out to mail her letter to Susanna around four. Susanna had fallen from her horse taking a low jump, in which the horse had fallen too. A miracle Susanna hadn't broken a bone! Susanna needed not only new riding breeches but a book of photographs of German cathedrals which the class was going to visit this summer, so Isabella had sent her a check on their Swiss bank. As soon as Isabella had got back home and closed her door, the telephone rang.

"Signora Ghiardini—" It sounded like Ugo speaking through a handkerchief. "We have your husband. Do not try to find out where he is. One hundred million lire we want. Do you understand?"

"Where is he?" Isabella demanded, putting on an act as if Elisabetta or someone else were listening; but no one was, unless Luigi had picked up the living-room extension phone. It was Elisabetta's afternoon off.

"Get the money by tomorrow noon. Do not inform the police. This evening at seven a messenger will tell you where to deliver the money." Ugo hung up.

That sounded all right! Just what Isabella had expected. Now she had to get busy, especially with Caccia-Lunghi, Filippo's boss, higher than Vicente in the Bureau of Public Welfare and Environment. But first she went into her bathroom, where she was sure Ugo would not be peering in, washed her face and made herself up again to give herself confidence. She would soon be putting a lot of money into Ugo's pocket and the pocket of his friend—whoever was helping him.

Isabella now envisaged Ugo her slave for a long time to come. She would have the power of betraying him if he got out of hand, and if Ugo chose to betray *her*, she would simply deny it, and between the two of them she had no doubt which one the police would choose to believe: her.

"Vicente!" Isabella said in a hectic voice into the telephone (she had decided after all to ring Vicente first). "Filippo has been kidnaped! That's why he didn't turn up this morning! I've just had a message from the kidnapers. They're asking for a hundred million lire by tomorrow noon!"

She and Filippo, of course, had not that much money in the bank, she went on, and wasn't it the responsibility of the government, since Filippo was a government employee, an official?

Vicente sighed audibly. "The government has had enough of such things. You'd better try Filippo's father, Isabella."

"But he's so stubborn!—The kidnaper said something about throwing Filippo in a river!"

"They all say that. Try the father, my dear."

So Isabella did. It was nearly six p.m. before she could reach him, because he had been "in conference." Isabella first asked, "Has Filippo spoken to you today?" He had not. Then she explained that Filippo had been kidnaped, and that his captors wanted 100,000,000 lire by tomorrow noon.

"What? Kidnaped—and they want it from me? Why *me*?" the old man spluttered. "The government—Filippo's in the government!"

"I've asked Vicente Carda." Isabella told him about her rejection in a tearful voice, prolonging her story so that Filippo's predicament would have time to sink in.

"Va bene, va bene." Pietro Ghiardini sounded defeated. "I can

contribute seventy-five million, not more. What a business! You'd think Italy..." He went on, though he sounded on the brink of a heart attack.

Isabella expressed gratitude, but she was disappointed. She would have to come up with the rest out of their bank account—unless of course she could make a deal with Ugo. Old Pietro promised that the money would be delivered by ten thirty the following morning.

If she and Filippo were due to go anywhere tonight, Isabella didn't give a damn, and she told Luigi to turn away people who might arrive at the door with the excuse that there was a crisis tonight—and they could interpret that as they wished, Isabella thought. Luigi was understanding, and most concerned, as was Elisabetta.

Ugo was prompt with another telephone call at seven, and though Isabella was alone in her bedroom, she played her part as though someone were listening, though no one could have been unless Luigi had picked up the living-room telephone. Isabella's voice betrayed anxiety, anger, and fear of what might happen to her husband. Ugo spoke briefly. She was to meet him in a tiny square which Isabella had never heard of—she scribbled the name down—at noon tomorrow, with 100,000,000 lire in old bills in 20,000 and 50,000 denominations in a shopping bag or basket, and then Filippo would be released at once on the edge of Rome. Ugo did not say where.

"Come alone. Filippo is well," Ugo said. "Goodbye, signora."

Vicente telephoned just afterward. Isabella told Vicente what she had to do, said that Filippo's father had come up with 75,000,000 and could the government provide the rest? Vicente said no, and wished Isabella and Filippo the best of luck.

And that was that. So early the next morning Isabella went to their bank and withdrew 25,000,000 lire from their savings, which left so little that she had to sign a check on their Swiss bank for a transfer when she got home. At half-past ten a chauffeur in uniform and puttees, with a bulge under his tunic that must have been a gun, arrived with a briefcase under each arm. Isabella took him into the bedroom for the transfer of money from the briefcases into the shopping bag—a black plastic bag belonging to Elisabetta. Isabella didn't feel like counting through all the soiled banknotes.

"You're sure it's exact?" she asked.

The calm and polite chauffeur said it was. He loaded the shopping bag for her, then took his leave with the briefcases.

Isabella ordered a taxi for eleven fifteen, because she had no idea how long it might take her to get to the little square, especially if they ran into a traffic jam somewhere. Elisabetta was worried, and asked for the tenth time, "Can't I come with you—just sit in the taxi, signora?"

"They will think you are a man in disguise with a gun," Isabella replied, though she intended to get out of the taxi a couple of streets away from the square, and dismiss the taxi.

The taxi arrived. Isabella said she should be back before one o'clock. She had looked up the square on her map of Rome, and had the map with her in case the taxi driver was vague.

"What a place!" said the driver. "I don't know it at all. Evidently you don't either."

"The mother of an old servant of mine lives there. I'm taking her some clothing," Isabella said by way of explaining the bulging but not very heavy shopping bag.

The driver let her out. Isabella had said she was uncertain of the house number, but could find out by asking neighbors. Now she was on her own, with a fortune in her right hand.

There was the little square, and there was Ugo, five minutes early, like herself, reading a newspaper on a bench. Isabella entered the little square slowly. It had a few ill-tended trees, a ground of square stones laid like a pavement. One old woman sat knitting on the only sunlit bench. It was a working-class neighborhood, or one mainly of old people, it seemed. Ugo got up and walked toward her.

"Giorno, signora," he said casually, with a polite nod, as if greeting an old acquaintance, and by his own walking led her toward the street pavement. "You're all right?"

"Yes. And—"

"He's quite all right.—Thank you for this." He glanced at her shopping bag. "Soon as we see everything's in order, we'll let Filippo—loose." His smile was reassuring.

"Where are we—"

"Just here," Ugo interrupted, pushing her to the left, toward the street, and a parked car's door suddenly swung open beside her. The push had not been a hard one, only rude and sudden enough to fluster Isabella for a moment. The man in the driver's seat had turned half around and had a pistol pointed at her, held

low on the back of the front seat.

"Just be quiet, Signora Isabella, and there will be no trouble at all—nobody hurt at all," the man with the gun said.

Ugo got in beside her in back and slammed the door shut. The car started off.

It had not even occurred to Isabella to scream, she realized. She had a glimpse of a man with a briefcase under his arm, walking only two meters away on the pavement, his eyes straight ahead. They were soon out in the country. There were a few houses, but mostly it was fields and trees. The man driving the car wore a hat.

"Isn't it necessary that I *join* Filippo, Ugo?" she asked.

Ugo laughed, then asked the man driving to pull in at a roadside bar-restaurant. Here Ugo got out, saying he would be just a minute. He had looked into the shopping bag long enough to see that it contained money and was not partly stuffed with newspaper. The man driving turned around in his seat.

"The signora will please be quiet," he said. "Everything is all right." He had the horrible accent of a Milan tough, attempting to be soothing to an unpredictable woman who might go off in a scream louder than a police siren. In his nervousness he was chewing gum.

"Where are you taking me?"

Ugo was coming back.

Isabella soon found out. They pulled in at a farmhouse whose occupants had evidently recently left—there were clothes on the line, dishes in the sink—but the only people now in the house seemed to be Isabella, Ugo, and his driver chum whom Ugo called Eddy. Isabella looked at an ashtray, recognizing Filippo's Turkish cigarette stubs, noticed also the pack empty and uncrumpled on the floor.

"Filippo has been released, signora," Ugo said. "He has money for a taxi and soon you should be able to phone him at home.—Sit down. Would you like a coffee?"

"Take me back to Rome!" Isabella shouted. But she knew. They had kidnapped *her*. "If you think there is any *more* money coming, you are quite mistaken, Ugo—and *you*!" she added to the smiling driver, an old slob now helping himself to whiskey.

"There is always more money," Ugo said calmly.

"Swine!" Isabella said. "I should have known from the time you first stared into my bathroom! That's your real occupation, you

creep!" A fear of assault crossed her mind, but only swiftly. Her rage was stronger just now. "After I tried to—to give you a break, turn a little money your way! *Look* at all that money!"

Eddy was now sitting on the floor counting it, like a child with an absorbing new toy or game, except that a big cigar stuck out of his mouth.

"Sit down, signora. All will be well when we telephone your husband."

Isabella sat down on a sagging sofa. There was mud on the heels of her shoes from the filthy courtyard she had just walked across. Ugo brought some warmed-over coffee. Isabella learned that still another chum of Ugo's had driven Filippo in another car and dropped him somewhere to make his own way home.

"He is quite all right, signora," Ugo assured her, bringing a plate of awful-looking sliced lamb and hunks of cheese. The other man was on his feet, and brought a basket of bread and a bottle of inferior wine. The men were hungry. Isabella took nothing, refusing even whiskey and wine. When the men had finished eating, Ugo sent Eddy off in the car to telephone Filippo from somewhere. The farmhouse had no telephone. How Isabella wished she had brought her tear-gas gun! But she had thought she would be among friends today.

Ugo sipped coffee, smoked a cigarette, and tried to assuage Isabella's anger. "By tonight, by tomorrow morning you will be back home, signora. No harm done! A room to yourself here! Even though the bed may not be as comfortable as the one you're used to."

Isabella refused to answer him, and bit her lip, thinking that she had got herself into an awful mess, had cost herself and Filippo 25,000,000 lire, and might cost them another 50,000,000 (or whatever she was worth) because Filippo's father might decide not to come up with the money to ransom her.

Eddy came back with an air of disappointment and reported in his disgusting slang that signor Ghiardini had told him to go stuff himself.

"What?" Ugo jumped up from his chair. "We'll try again. We'll threaten—didn't you threaten—"

Eddy nodded. "He said. . ." Again the revolting phrase.

"We'll see how it goes tonight—around seven or so," said Ugo.

"How much are you asking?" Isabella was unable to repress the question any longer. Her voice had gone shrill.

"Fifty million, signora," replied Ugo.

"We simply haven't got it—not after *this*!" Isabella gestured toward the shopping bag, now in a corner of the room.

"Ha, ha," Ugo laughed softly. "The Ghiardinis haven't got another fifty million? Or the government? Or Papa Ghiardini?"

The other man announced that he was going to take a nap in the other room. Ugo turned on the radio to some pop music. Isabella remained seated on the uncomfortable sofa. She had declined to remove her coat. Ugo paced about, thinking, talking a little to himself, half drunk with the realization of all the money in the corner of the room. The gun lay on the center table near the radio. She looked at it with an idea of grabbing it and turning it on Ugo, but she knew she could probably not keep both men at bay if Eddy woke up.

When Eddy did wake up and returned to the room, Ugo announced that he was going to try to telephone Filippo, while Eddy kept watch on Isabella. "No funny business," said Ugo like an army officer, before going out.

It was just after six.

Eddy tried to engage her in conversation about revolutionary tactics, about Ugo's having been a journalist once, a photographer also (Isabella could imagine what kind of photographer). Isabella was angry and bored, and hated herself for replying even slightly to Eddy's moronic ramblings. He was talking about making a down payment on a house with the money he had gained from Filippo's abduction. Ugo would also start leading a more decent life, which was what he deserved, said Eddy.

"He deserves to be behind bars for the protection of the *public*!" Isabella shot back.

The car had returned. Ugo entered with his slack mouth even slacker, a look of puzzlement on his brow. "Gotta let her go, he may have traced the call," Ugo said to Eddy, and snapped his fingers for action.

Eddy at once went for the shopping bag and carried it out to the car.

"Your husband says you can go to hell," said Ugo. "He will not pay one lire."

It suddenly sank into Isabella. She stood up, feeling scared, feeling naked somehow, even though she still wore her coat over her dress. "He is joking. He'll——" But somehow she knew Filippo wouldn't. "Where're you taking me now?"

Ugo laughed. He laughed heartily, rocking back as he always did, laughing at Isabella and also at himself. "So I have lost fifty million! A pity, eh? Big pity. But the joke is on *you*! Hah! Ha, ha, ha!—Come on, Signora Isabella, what've you got in your purse? Let's see." He took her purse rudely from her hands.

Isabella knew she had about twenty thousand in her billfold. This Ugo laid with a large gesture on the center table, then turned off the radio.

"Let's go," he said, indicating the door, smiling. Eddy had started the car. Ugo's happy mood seemed to be contagious. Eddy began laughing too at Ugo's comments. *The lady was worth nothing!* That was the idea. *La donna niente*, they sang.

"You won't get away with this for long, you piece of filth!" Isabella said to Ugo.

More laughter.

"Here! Fine!" yelled Ugo who was with Isabella in the back seat again, and Eddy pulled the car over to the edge of the road.

Where were they? Isabella had thought they were heading for Rome, but wasn't sure. Yes. She saw some high-rise apartment buildings. A truck went by, close, as she got out with Ugo, half pulled by him.

"Shoes, signora! Ha, ha!" He pushed her against the car and bent to take off her pumps. She kicked him, but he only laughed. She swung her handbag, catching him on the head with it, and nearly fell herself as he snatched off her second shoe. Ugo jumped, with the shoes in his hand, back into the car which roared off.

To be shoeless in silk stockings was a nasty shock. Isabella began walking—toward Rome. She could see lights coming on here and there in the twilight dimness. She'd hitch a ride to the next roadside bar and telephone for a taxi, she thought, pay the taxi when she got home. A large truck passed her by as if blind to her frantic waving. So did a car with a single man in it. Isabella was ready to hitch a lift with anyone!

She walked on, realizing that her stockings were now torn and open at the bottom, and when she stopped to pick something out of one foot, she saw blood. It was more than 15 minutes later when Isabella made her painful way to a restaurant on the opposite of the road where she begged the use of the telephone.

Isabella did not at all like the smile of the young waiter who looked her up and down and was plainly surmising what must have happened to her: a boy friend had chucked her out of his car.

Isabella telephoned a taxi company's number which the waiter provided. There would be at least ten minutes to wait, she was told, so she stood by the coat rack at the front of the place, feeling miserable and ashamed with her dirty feet and torn stockings. Passing waiters glanced at her. She had to explain to the proprietor—a stuffy type—that she was waiting for a taxi.

The taxi arrived, Isabella gave her address, and the driver looked dubious, so Isabella had to explain that her husband would pay the fare at the other end. She was almost in tears.

Isabella fell against the porter's bell, as if it were home itself. Giorgio opened the doors. Filippo came across the court, scowling.

"The taxi—" Isabella said.

Filippo was reaching into a pocket. "As if I had anything left!"

Isabella took the last excruciating steps across the courtyard to the door out of which Elisabetta was now running to help her.

Elisabetta made tea for her. Isabella sat in the tub, soaking her feet, washing off the filth of Ugo and his ugly chum. She applied surgical spirits to the soles of her feet, then put on clean white woolen booties and a dressing gown. She cast one furious glance at the bathroom window, sure Ugo would never come back.

As soon as she came out of her bathroom, Filippo said, "I suppose you remember—tonight we have the Greek consul coming to dinner with his wife. And two other men. Six in all. I was going to receive them alone—make some excuse." His tone was icy.

Isabella did remember; but had somehow thought all that would be canceled. Nothing was canceled. She could see it now: life would go on as usual, not a single date would be canceled. They were poorer. That was all. Isabella rested in her bed, with some newspapers and magazines, then got up and began to dress. Filippo came in, not even knocking first.

"Wear the peach-colored dress tonight—not that one," he said. "The Greeks need cheering up."

Isabella began removing the dark blue dress she had put on.

"I know you arranged all this," Filippo continued. "They were ready to kill me, those hoodlums—or at least they acted like it. My father is furious! What stupid arrangements!—I can also make some arrangements. Wait and see!"

Isabella said nothing. And *her* future arrangements? Well, she might make some too. She gave Filippo a look. Then she gritted her teeth as she squeezed her swollen feet into "the right shoes" for the evening. When she got up, she had to walk with a limp.

a **NEW** short story by

JOHN LUTZ

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth," the Bible says. D'ye understand that? God help ye if ye do!" said the vicar of Blakefield, preceding his death from acute alcoholism in Dublin, June 1823 . . . This is the epigraph that John Lutz himself chose for his story, "The Other Runner," a story you will remember with a shiver for a long time . . .

THE OTHER RUNNER

by **JOHN LUTZ**

|| jog. Like people all over this mechanized world who have discovered the benefits of jogging, of what really is old-fashioned running.

I'm tired now, in my third mile this evening. I feel that I can't make it the mile and a half back to my cabin, but a part of me deep down knows that I will.

What I'm running on is an old bridle path. It once was cinder, but the mountain thunderstorms and melting snows have worn it to the hard gray surface on which I now struggle. The path is approximately two and one-half miles long, meandering in a roughly circular route around Mirror Lake. For an instant I can glimpse through the trees and see the cedar shake roof of my small cabin, and as always the sight strengthens my determination to reach that point of triumph.

Around and above me the woods are green and shadowed, and occasionally I hear birds twitter in alarm at my approach, or a squirrel or rabbit bolt unseen for cover. I negotiate a slight rise, one of the most grueling stretches of my morning runs, and my thighs suddenly ache under the uphill strain, my breath rasping in louder, quicker rhythm.

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Then the high path levels out, sweeps in a sloping crescent to the south. A steep drop on my left, steep rising bare mountain face on my right. At my feet Mirror Lake suddenly glitters blue-green, a jewel nestled deep in a rough green setting.

I draw breath and resolution as I turn onto the final leg of my run, a series of small rises, then a long gentle grade to my cabin. That final downgrade is the best of the run, the very sweetest. Lovely gravity.

Half an hour later I've showered, and I sit now on the wooden porch of my cabin, my feet propped up on the porch rail, a cold can of low-calorie beer on the wicker table beside me. Totally relaxed, I wait for darkness.

I've been jogging for six weeks, since my divorce became final. When Marsha left me I took stock of myself, decided I needed to lose ten to fifteen pounds, strengthen my heart and lungs for the coming lonely battle with encroaching age. I was 43 in March.

Of course age and weight weren't my only reasons for taking up jogging. Tension. Jogging is one of the greatest tension relievers there is, and I was under more tension during the divorce, the unexpected bitterness, than I would ever have guessed I could bear.

And perhaps I couldn't have borne it without the escape and spiritual experience of running, and the isolation of this tiny cabin near Mirror Lake. I've been here two weeks now, and each day I'm gladder I came. Oh, the tension remains, but now I easily hold it at bay.

Seclusion heals. And there is only one other occupied house on the lake, a large flat-roofed modern structure that juts from the side of the east hill like the imbedded prow of a ship. The Mulhaneys are staying there, Dan and Iris. Dan looks to be a few years older than my 43, a beefy, graying man with a sad-pug, brutal face. Iris I've seen once, as she stood staring into the lake, a lithe, long-waisted woman with long brown hair and graceful neck. One of those women who somehow by their silent presence will be able to exercise an attraction for men even into old age, a woman not just alive but aflame—coldly aflame.

I've not yet spoken to either of the Mulhaneys; it was from the talkative shopkeeper at the one-pump gas station-grocery store near Daleville that I learned their identities. Though Dan Mulhaney I see almost every day. He's a morning jogger. Always a few minutes either side of nine o'clock he pads wearily past my

kitchen window, as I'm drinking my coffee. We wave to each other. He's never stopped; he can't break stride.

But one morning he does stop.

Mulhaney simply ceases exerting effort and his bulky white-clad form decelerates to a walk with machine-like inevitability. I stand up from the table and take half a dozen steps out onto the porch.

"Morning," Mulhaney says. "Though I oughta introduce myself." He holds out a perspiring hand. "Dan Mulhaney."

"Earl Crydon." I shake the hand.

"Wife and I are staying in the house up on the hill. Here to get away from things."

"That's why I'm here myself."

"Vacation?"

"No, I'm a free-lance writer, so my office can pretty well travel with me."

Mulhaney rubs large hairy hands on his shapeless T-shirt, stands silently, expectantly.

"Been jogging long?" I ask.

"About three months. I'm up to six miles. How about you?"

"I can do a bit over five, which is quite an improvement over my first outing. I run in the evenings, after things have cooled."

Mulhaney suddenly seems ill at ease. I offer him coffee.

"Better not, but thanks." He begins jogging easily in place to keep up his circulation. "I better get moving before I get stiff." He fades backward, graceful for a big man, waves, then turns and strikes a practised, moderate pace. He jogs in the opposite direction from myself—clockwise. There is about him an air of mild confusion.

Next morning, as I sit sipping coffee in my crude pine-paneled kitchen, I hear Mulhaney's approach at exactly two minutes to nine. When he comes into view I raise my hand to wave, but he doesn't look in my direction. His pace is faster than usual, and on his perspiring flushed face is an expression of perplexity, of muted fright. Almost as if he is running *from* something.

"Morning!" I call through the window.

His head jerks in my direction and he smiles mechanically, gives a tentative wave. The rhythmic beat of his footsteps recedes.

That evening, as I jog through long shadows past the precariously balanced Mulhaney house, I can hear shouting coming from inside, a man and a woman, abrupt, heated words that are

only desperate, indecipherable sounds when they reach my ears. I jog on.

The next several mornings I watch Mulhaney jog past my cabin window and each time his beefy face wears that same quizzical, fearful expression. Then, on Friday morning, I hear the broken, slowing rhythm of his footsteps, and even before he comes into view I know that he's stopping to talk. I finish my coffee and rise to walk onto the porch to greet him.

Mulhaney invites me to join him and his wife that evening for cocktails and some outdoor-grilled steaks—after I've returned from jogging, of course. I accept, some side of me faintly resenting this intrusion on my self-imposed isolation, and tell him I'll run earlier this evening so I can be there at dinner time. We decide on eight o'clock.

I get to the Mulhaney house at five minutes to eight, feeling fresh and relaxed after my early run and cool shower. Dan Mulhaney is waiting for me by a redwood gate at the top of a long winding flight of mossy stone steps that leads to the side of the jutting, angled house. We shake hands as he works a pitted metal latch and opens the gate.

"My wife Iris," he says, pride of possession in his voice.

Iris is standing near a white steel table on a brick veranda bordered by thick twisted ivy. She's wearing white shorts and a violet-colored blouse that brings out the violet of her eyes. She smiles. "A drink, Mr. Crydon? Scotch, martini, beer?"

"Beer. And it's Earl, Mrs. Mulhaney."

"Then it's Iris." As she walks toward an open door she says, "I understand you're a compulsive exerciser like my husband."

"I like to run."

I walk with Mulhaney to a no-frills barbecue pit and examine three still-raw steaks.

"Extra-lean," he assures me, as Iris returns with my beer in a glass and with her own martini glass replenished. We drift to the center of the veranda and sit at the white metal table. There is a hole in the center of the table for an umbrella, and round plastic coasters for our glasses.

"Beautiful place," I say, looking around me at glass and squared redwood. A red Porsche convertible squats in the gravel drive.

Iris shrugs. "I hate it."

I raise my glass and look at her, noticing the sheen of her eyes

and the faint flush on her cheeks. The results of more than one or two martinis. "But you're staying here," I say.

"Daniel's idea." Her fingertips brush a faded purplish splotch on the side of her neck.

"Both of us had the idea, actually," Mulhaney says quickly. He swivels in his chair to check the wink of flame above the rim of the barbecue pit. "Hey, I better keep an eye on those steaks." He stands and moves away.

"The salad's tossed," Iris says after him. She fixes a violet stare on me. "Daniel sort of twisted my arm to get me to come up here, Earl." A sip of martini. "Marital difficulties. Private matter."

I shift in my hard white chair, slightly embarrassed. "No need to tell me about it, Iris. I'm not qualified to give advice." I wonder how "sort of" was the arm twisting.

"You're not married?"

"Divorced."

Even her smile is violet. There is an unmistakable intensity there.

"I've had enough woman trouble to hold me for a while," I say, and truthfully.

"Well done?" Dan Mulhaney calls to me, probing the largest steak with a long-tined fork.

"Sure," I tell him, "go ahead and burn it."

Iris smiles at me and rises to get the salad.

Again that expression on Mulhaney's face, as if someone—or something—is chasing him.

I sit by my kitchen window, sipping coffee, and glance at my watch. He's early this morning.

The next morning he stops to talk.

"Hot for morning," he says, wiping his glistening face with his T-shirt.

I lean on a cedar porch post. "It is if you're jogging." I can see that Mulhaney is bothered by something more than the heat.

"Any large wild animals around here?" he asks. "I mean, have you ever seen any foxes, bobcats or—anything?"

"Never anything bigger than a rabbit. There used to be bears and cougars in this area, but not for years."

He nods, his broad red face grotesque with a frown in the harsh morning light. "Have you ever been around hunting dogs, Crydon?"

"Not often."

"You can walk where there are a dozen of them lying in the sun, watching you and not watching you. Nothing happens. But if you run they'll sometimes chase you as if you were game."

"Instinct."

Mulhaney seems hesitant to speak further, but he does. "In the evenings, when you're running, do you ever get the feeling that something's—well, behind you?"

"I never have."

"There's an old Gaelic saying to the effect that if you run fast enough long enough, something is bound to give chase."

"Like the hunting dogs. And you think something's chasing you?"

"I don't think it—it's a feeling. Imagination, I guess. But I'm not the imaginative sort." He snorts an embarrassed laugh. "If I were you I'd think Dan Mulhaney was due for a psychiatric checkup."

"Have you ever considered turning around?" I ask him. "Running back toward whatever you think is behind you?"

I'm surprised by the fear in his eyes. "No, no, I couldn't do that."

As he stands talking to me, helpless in all his aging bulk, I feel a wash of deep pity for Mulhaney, of comradeship. I tell him to wait and I go into the cabin. When I return I hand him my revolver. Perhaps this seems extreme, but it is only a small-caliber target pistol. And what if Mulhaney is right? What if something is running behind him, stalking him? This is still reasonably wild country.

"Carry this tucked in your belt if you'd like," I say. "If nothing else, it should make you feel more secure."

He holds the small pistol before him in gratitude and surprise. "You don't have to do this."

"Why shouldn't I? I haven't fired that gun in over a year, so I won't miss it."

"I'll pay you for it."

"Give it back to me when you leave here, or when you feel you haven't any more use for it."

Mulhaney grins, tucks the pistol into the waistband of his shorts beneath his baggy T-shirt. He really is grateful. We shake hands and he jogs up the path, his footsteps somehow more confident on the hard earth.

I go inside, pour another cup of coffee, and wonder if I've made a mistake.

But the pistol has nothing to do with Thursday's tragedy.

At ten o'clock in the morning a horn honks outside my cabin, a series of abrupt, frantic blasts. I walk to the door and see Iris sitting behind the wheel of the red Porsche. Her hair is tangled, wild. Her eyes are wild.

"I need your help, Earl! Something's happened to Dan!"

I shut the cabin door and trot to the car. "Where is he?"

"On the path. He went jogging this morning as he always does, but he didn't return. I went looking for him, found him lying on the ground. He—he doesn't seem to be breathing."

I move around and get in on the passenger side of the car. Iris rotates the wheel expertly, turns around in the front yard of my cabin, and the Porsche roars back up the path.

Dan Mulhaney is on the highest part of the path, where the hill drops abruptly toward the lake on one side and to the smooth rock that rises steeply to a wooded crest on the other. He is lying on his stomach, his body curiously hunched, his head twisted as if he's straining to get air. We get out of the Porsche almost before it stops rocking, and I know immediately Daniel Mulhaney is dead.

As I'm feeling automatically and hopelessly for vital signs, my hand touches the cool steel of my revolver still tucked in Mulhaney's waistband. He is lying on the gun, concealing it.

"Does your cabin have a phone?" I ask Iris.

She nods, staring at her husband. "He's so still, so wax-like. He's dead . . ."

"We can't be sure. Go to your cabin and call a doctor, Iris. I'll stay here."

She nods once, gets into the Porsche, and backs some distance to a wide space at the base of the rise, where she can turn the car around. When she is out of sight I reach beneath Mulhaney's body and remove the gun. It hasn't been fired. I tuck it inside my belt, beneath my shirt. I didn't count on this happening; I don't even have a permit for the gun.

"It looks like a heart attack," the doctor says, 45 minutes later, as Iris and I look on. The doctor sighs and slowly stands. He's a middle-aged but somehow older-appearing man from nearby Daleville, a general practitioner. "You say he jogged regularly?"

"Faithfully," Iris says. She seems to be in mild shock.

The doctor shakes his graying head. "It's a pattern. Overweight, middle-aged, probably high blood pressure. Trying to run like a man of twenty-five and his heart gave out, would be my guess. Thousands of them die like this across the country every year. It's a pattern."

"He was so . . . so healthy," Iris says.

"Maybe he just thought he was," the doctor answers softly. "An ambulance is on the way. We'll take him to Mathers' Funeral Home in Daleville if that's agreeable with you, Mrs. Mulhaney."

Iris nods.

"Why don't you take Mrs. Mulhaney home, give her this with a glass of water." He hands me a small white pill and glances at Iris. "A sedative. Nothing strong."

I get into the car beside Iris and she backs down the road, turns the car, and drives slowly toward her jutting redwood cabin. There is little I can say to her that will help, so I stare straight ahead in silence.

At the cabin she thanks me, assures me that she'll be all right, and with the small white pill clenched in her hand goes inside.

Half an hour later, from my cabin window, I see the ambulance carrying Dan Mulhaney's body carefully negotiating the narrow path. No need for speed, flashing lights, or siren. For the first time since the divorce I take a strong drink, sour mash bourbon on the rocks. I feel a sadness out of proportion to my mere familiarity with Dan Mulhaney.

It's impossible for me to work the rest of the afternoon. Clouds have moved into the area, casting even more gloom, and each hour brings a stronger threat of rain.

At five o'clock, much earlier than usual, I decide that I should run to beat the rain. It takes me only a few minutes to get into my jogging shoes, gray shorts, and faded red T-shirt. The gun I lent Mulhaney is still loaded, and rather than take time to unload it, or leave it in the cabin while I'm gone, I transfer it to the waistband of my shorts. Jogging is what I need to shake off my depression, to obscure the impressions of this morning.

I'm breathing hard by the time I reach the scene of Mulhaney's death. For an instant I feel a shuddering dread, then reassure myself by remembering that Mulhaney was older than my 43 years, as well as overweight. I jog past the death site, instinctively avoiding the exact spot where the body was found. I find myself running between the tire tracks of the Porsche, tracks that

must have been left when Iris drove along the path and discovered the body, and when she drove us back to try to help Mulhaney.

And I wonder, why would she come back this way, the long way, instead of continuing past my cabin, the way the car was pointed? That way we could have reached Mulhaney in less than a minute. As my feet pound along the path, I see in the gray dust this morning's footprints from Mulhaney's shoes, exactly like my own footprints only reversed. But his footprints don't describe a straight line; rather they move from one side of the path to the other, with varying spaces between them. He must have staggered in considerable pain before falling.

As I continue to run I keep staring down at the footprints pointing in the opposite direction from the way I'm jogging. Mulhaney staggered an incredible distance, almost all the way up the steepening hill. Why would a man in that much pain continue to run, to push himself? I know what that takes, even without the agonizing spasms of a heart attack.

I stop running.

Still breathing hard, I walk slowly back the way I came.

Now I can see the more subtle veerings of one set of tire tracks, hardly noticeable unless under close scrutiny. The zigzag, irregular patterns of Mulhaney's footprints are paralleled and bounded by the snaking set of tire tracks.

I stop walking where Mulhaney's body was found and backhand the sweat from my forehead.

It's a cold sweat.

She killed him. Dogged him up the hill with the car, at a point where he was already exhausted from over an hour of jogging. On one side of the path the bare face of the mountain rising steep and smooth, and on the other side the long drop to the lake. He had to keep running until he collapsed. If Mulhaney hadn't been dead on the path, Iris probably would have pushed his body over the edge to fall toward the lake. An accident, it would seem. Iris knew her husband was dead when she came to me for help.

Thunder suddenly crashes, echoing about me, but still it doesn't rain. I jog on toward my cabin, through air charged by the imminent storm.

A tingling of alarm through my body, and I hear the car's strangely atavistic roar.

The Porsche rounds the curve near my cabin and speeds toward

me. I know it will reach the base of the hill before I can. *I will be in the same position Mulhaney was in!*

Iris works it artfully, varying her speed, always a split second from running me down, keeping me gasping, struggling to gain precious inches of life-sustaining ground.

As I glance back, I see her behind the wheel, her hair flowing beautifully, a fixed dreamy expression on her face. I know why Mulhaney didn't use the gun, know how much, in his possessive, brutish fashion, he must have loved her. I've no such compunctions, only chilling fear.

Unlike Mulhaney, I've had my brief respite while examining the tire tracks and footprints, enough to regain some of my stamina. I put on a burst of speed, draw the gun from my waistband, and twist my body to fire as accurately as possible. The gun kicks in my hand and I see astonishment on Iris' face.

It takes three shots to stop her. The Porsche stalls and nestles against the rocky side of the hill, one rear wheel off the ground. The windshield is starred and Iris is slumped sobbing over the steering wheel. I walk back and see no blood. She isn't hit.

"I was afraid you'd jog early," she says from the cradle of her arms on the steering wheel. "Was watching your cabin, hoping you wouldn't leave." Her head flies back and she stares madly at the sky. "It was supposed to rain!" She begins pounding the steering wheel with her fist. "It was supposed to rain early this afternoon and wash away the tracks!"

I help her out of the car and we walk toward her cabin to phone the county sheriff. Iris sobs, cursing almost with every step. Right now I'm sure she hates the weather forecaster even more than she hated her husband.

I live year-round in the city now. And I still jog. As my feet pound the hard earth I sometimes wonder about Daniel Mulhaney, if he really thought he was being pursued, stalked, or if he had some sort of premonition of his death, sensed some manifestation of his wife's hate.

An uneasiness comes over me at times as I run through lengthening evening shadows, and I remember what the prematurely aged doctor at Mirror Lake said. *It's a pattern . . .* And I remember what Dan Mulhaney said about how if you run fast enough long enough, something is bound to give chase.

And now and then I glance behind me.

a **NEW** Pierre Chambrun story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Everything in the Hotel Beaumont, New York's top luxury hotel, is perfection—that was the boast of Pierre Chambrun, the legendary manager of the Beaumont. But even Chambrun had to admit that there were certain exceptions to his rule, occasional imperfections that could not be prevented. For example, crime can occur anywhere—even in Paradise . . .

CHAMBRUN CORRECTS AN IMPERFECTION

by **HUGH PENTECOST**

Terror is so much a part of the world climate today that when the average person, reading or listening to the news, becomes aware of a new hijacking, a new kidnaping, a new demand for the release of political prisoners, a new slaughter of innocent people, he is inclined just to nod and go on to the sports pages. It's an everyday thing. But if you are in the center of it, if you are trying to save a life or lives, it's quite another matter.

I was projected into such a situation on a warm summer evening—or perhaps I should say morning. It was still dark and I came up out of deep sleep, wakened by the telephone on my bedside table. I picked up the receiver and muttered something unintelligible.

"Mr. Haskell? Mrs. Kiley here."

Mrs. Kiley is the night chief operator on the switchboard of the Hotel Beaumont, New York's top luxury hotel, where I live and work.

"What the hell time is it?" I mumbled.

"Quarter past four," Mrs. Kiley said. "Mark, the boss wants you on the double in his office."

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"At four o'clock in the morning?"

"That's the word."

The boss's word is law. He is Pierre Chambrun, the almost legendary manager of the Beaumont where I am his public relations genius. I can't ever remember being routed out at such an hour, but mine not to reason why. Chambrun is not given to whims, nor is he inconsiderate. One of my jobs is to put the hotel to bed at night and he had to know I couldn't have been asleep for more than an hour.

I pulled on some clothes and stumbled down the corridor to Chambrun's suite of offices. To my surprise Betsy Ruysdale, Chambrun's fabulous secretary, was at her desk in the outer office. There was no reason for her to be there at such an hour, except for the fact that she has a genius for being at the ready when Chambrun needs her. She is a handsome woman in her mid-thirties.

"Big trouble," she said to me, gesturing toward the door of Chambrun's private office. That was all. Whatever the trouble was I was to get it from the fountainhead, not from her.

Chambrun's office is more like a gracious living room than a place of business. The Persian rug on the floor is a museum piece. The blue-period Picasso on the wall facing Chambrun's carved Florentine desk is a gift from the artist himself. Except for three telephones the desk is uncluttered. You would have guessed that the furniture, the drapes at the windows, had been chosen by an expert decorator, but actually Chambrun was responsible for everything in the room—his own choices, his own taste.

Chambrun is a short square man with bright black eyes buried in deep pouches. He chain-smokes Egyptian cigarettes and there is always a demitasse of Turkish coffee at his elbow, prepared in a samovar on a sideboard by Miss Ruysdale. I could tell, as I walked in, from the rock-hard look of his face and the cold light in his dark eyes that "big trouble" had not been an overstatement.

There were three men with Chambrun in the office. Two of them I knew. One was Jerry Dodd, the wiry little security officer for the hotel. I suspect that Jerry and Ruysdale and I are the closest people to Chambrun on his staff. The second familiar face belonged to Rhaman Shadu, a tall handsome black man, Oxford educated, with a cultivated British accent. He is the United Nations ambassador from Kambashi. Don't ask me where Kambashi

is. It is what is called an "emerging nation," located somewhere in the Middle East or Africa. I had enjoyed a somewhat special relationship with Shadu 18 months before that early morning. He had chosen the Beaumont as a place to get married, and I had stage-managed the event for him. The Beaumont is the home-away-from-home for a great many U.N. people.

The third man, the stranger, was a slim, athletically built blond, with the palest blue eyes I could ever remember seeing. A very tough cookie, I decided, before I knew who he was.

"Frank Lewis—Mark Haskell," Chambrun said. The blond and I nodded to each other. "Mr. Lewis is an F.B.I. agent."

"What's up?" I asked.

"Claudia has been kidnaped from our suite here in the hotel," Rhaman Shadu told me. His voice wasn't steady.

Claudia was the bride of 18 months ago, the daughter of Joshua Powers, the steel multimillionaire. Claudia was a beautiful, glamorous, and somewhat notorious young woman. The marriage had created a sensation, partly because Rhaman Shadu was black, and partly because the government in Kambashi had expropriated Powers Steel in that country and had cost the old man many millions of dollars. Joshua Powers had refused to attend his daughter's wedding, and had apparently cut her out of his life. The gossip columnists had a ball with the story.

"A ransom note was left in Mr. Shadu's suite," Lewis said.

Shadu's laugh was bitter. "Five million dollars and the release of eleven political prisoners being held in my country. There is no way whatever of meeting either demand."

"Your father-in-law," Chambrun said in a flat voice.

"My father-in-law wouldn't lift a finger to help me," Shadu said.

"You aren't in trouble," Chambrun said. "It's your wife—his daughter."

"Claudia and her father haven't spoken to each other since we were married," Shadu said. "Claudia, bless her, has stayed loyal to me in that time. She and her father are two proud people. Neither one of them would make the opening move toward reconciliation."

"Somebody else has made the move," Chambrun said. "Your wife's life is at stake. You think Powers won't make any effort to save his own child?"

"Not if it costs him money," Shadu said bitterly. "In any case, the second demand is impossible—the release of political

prisoners. My government would never consent to that, no matter what the cost."

"I don't think I understand the politics of it," the F.B.I. man said.

Shadu shrugged. "There is always an underground opposition in these new emerging nations, Mr. Lewis," he said. "Terror is their only weapon. For my government to set free eleven of its most dangerous enemies would be to lose face, to weaken its authority, to encourage its own downfall. Nothing on earth could persuade them to surrender to terrorist demands."

"Your wife is an American woman," Lewis said. "If they let her die the political repercussions could be serious."

Shadu gave the F.B.I. man the look of a patient parent trying to explain something to a small child. "Kambashi is an important customer of what is called the military-industrial complex of your country, Mr. Lewis. There might be a public outcry if Claudia, God help me, was murdered by these people, but pressures in high places would prevent any sort of government retaliation. We buy too much military hardware from the big multinational corporations in this country to make retaliation a sensible course of action. It is one unhappy woman's life against huge profits. In today's world profits come first."

A little red light blinked on one of the phones on Chambrun's desk. He leaned forward and turned on the squawk box which made the call audible to all of us in the room.

"I have Mr. Powers on the line," Miss Ruysdale's voice told us.

Chambrun picked up the phone. "Mr. Powers? I am Pierre Chambrun, the manager of the Beaumont Hotel in New York. You know that your daughter has been kidnaped from her suite here?"

"I know, and I have no intention of talking to you about it, Chambrun." It was the harsh, angry voice of a strong man.

"You are on an open call, Mr. Powers," Chambrun said. "With me and hearing your voice are your son-in-law, Mr. Shadu, two trusted employees of mine, and an F.B.I. agent. You've heard directly from the kidnapers?"

"Of course," Powers said. "Who else would they go to for money? My son-in-law has no way of raising the amount of cash they're asking for."

"But you are prepared to come up with it?"

"I am not!" Powers almost shouted. "I know those Kambashi—

they'll never release political prisoners. Without that the money would just go down the drain."

"I'm Frank Lewis, F.B.I.," Lewis said. "You could give us time by agreeing, Mr. Powers."

"Time for what?" Powers demanded.

"Time to try to locate your daughter. Time to negotiate over the political prisoners. Time to try to prevent a cold-blooded murder."

"Claudia made her own bed. Let her lie in it," Powers said.

"Five million dollars means as much to you as a steak dinner means to me," Chambrun said in a flat voice. "You can at least agree to get up the money if we can negotiate for the prisoners."

"Ask Shadu," Powers said. "He'll tell you his butcher boys in Kambashi will never turn those prisoners loose. You're wasting your breath and my time, Mr. Chambrun."

The phone went dead.

It was hard to believe that a man of limitless wealth could be so callous about the survival of his only child, and I said so.

"So hard to believe that I don't believe it," Chambrun said.

"You don't know Joshua Powers," Shadu said.

"I don't need to know him personally," Chambrun said. "He is a recognizable type—a man who runs his own world, solves his own problems, wields his own power. The kidnapers contacted him directly because he was the most likely person to meet their demands. Money, as you said, is the key to everything in today's world. Powers can meet the kidnaper's money demands and he may be the one person who could arrange for the release of those prisoners."

"There is no way he could arrange that," Shadu said. "No way he could bring pressure on my government."

"He could buy them out," Chambrun said. "He could buy them out with money or with the military hardware they need so badly."

"You simply don't understand the politics of it, Mr. Chambrun," Shadu said. "My government couldn't release those prisoners, no matter how attractive an offer might be. There would be no way to explain it without loss of face."

"A break-out of prison could be arranged, a rescue staged," Chambrun said.

"And the New leaders of the Revolution would become heroes. My government couldn't risk that."

"New Revolution?" I asked.

"The terrorist opposition to my government," Shadu said. He glanced at the F.B.I. man. "Mark hasn't seen the note I found in my suite, Mr. Lewis."

Lewis produced a sheet of paper from his inside jacket pocket and handed it to me. There was a message scrawled on it in capital letters.

YOUR WIFE IS IN OUR HANDS. THE PRICE FOR HER LIFE IS FIVE MILLION DOLLARS AND THE RELEASE FROM PRISON OF OUR ELEVEN BROTHERS.

THE NEW REVOLUTION

"This note has already been made public in my country, and it will be made public in your media later today," Shadu said. "Even if your cynical notion of my government was accurate they couldn't risk any kind of deal. A break-out from jail or a staged rescue would never be believed by the people of Kambashi. That note, made public, makes any kind of deal impossible. More likely, those prisoners will be executed to show the world that we don't give in to terrorist pressures."

Chambrun appeared not to be listening. Heavy eyelids were like window shades drawn down over his eyes. He asked a question of anyone who had the answer.

"Is there any indication of what time Mrs. Shadu was taken?"

Shadu made a helpless little gesture with unsteady hands. "I have been involved with lengthy negotiations at the United Nations," he said. "I was involved until half-past two this morning. I got back here about a quarter to three. I found that threatening note when I let myself into my suite—16B. Claudia was gone."

"When did you last see her or have contact with her?"

"Because of these late-night sessions we slept until noon," Shadu said. "Room service served us breakfast. I left for the United Nations building about one thirty. That was the last time I saw Claudia."

"Did you talk with her on the phone after that?"

Shadu nodded. "I talked to her about six o'clock to tell her I was faced with another late-night session."

"So she was kidnaped some time after six," Chambrun said. His heavy lids lifted to look at Jerry Dodd, our security man. "That's a beginning point, Jerry. Did she dine in her suite? Room Service can answer that one. Did she dine somewhere else in the hotel? If she did, was she alone? She is as famous as a movie star in the

Beaumont, married here, a guest many times before that wedding, and she has been here for nearly a month on this visit. If she went out of the hotel for dinner someone on the staff must have almost certainly seen her leave."

"I'll get at it," Jerry said, and walked briskly out of the office.

I knew that Chambrun was hoping that he could prove Claudia Shadu had been kidnaped outside the hotel. When the story broke in a few hours it would be bad publicity for the Beaumont if she had been taken here in the hotel. The Beaumont's reputation was always of vital concern to him.

"How do you know," he asked Shadu, "that the kidnaping has already been made public in Kambashi?"

"The first thing I did, after I found the note, was to put in an overseas call to the head of the secret police in my country. He already knew what I had called to tell him. He made it clear to me that there was no chance whatever of the prisoners being released."

"Meanwhile the kidnapers had already contacted Joshua Powers. What did you do after that?"

"I put in a call to the F.B.I.," Shadu said. "They deal with kidnapings in this country. After talking to my contact in Kambashi I knew they were the only chance Claudia had. The prisoners would not be released, and I knew I had no way of raising the kind of money they were demanding."

"Obviously the kidnapers knew that the money would have to come from Powers if it was to come at all. It would help to know when they called him. You have the authority to insist on knowing that, Mr. Lewis."

"I can try," Lewis said. "Where did your secretary reach him?"

Chambrun pressed the intercom button on his desk and asked Miss Ruysdale the question.

"In New York," she said. "He's staying at the Waldorf. His home in Pittsburgh told me that when I told them Mrs. Shadu was in serious trouble."

"I'll take a crack at him," Lewis said.

Chambrun and I were left alone with Rhaman Shadu. The elegant black man sank down into one of the green leather armchairs. He looked exhausted.

"Lewis won't have any luck," he said. "Powers has made up his mind not to help, and he won't. He has an obsession about people stealing money from him."

"Does it occur to you," Chambrun asked, "that the kidnapers may have warned him not to deal with the police or the F.B.I.? Perhaps he is helping in the best way he knows how—following instructions."

"I wish I could believe that," Shadu said. "Oh, God, I wish I could believe."

Five o'clock in the morning is not the best time to gather information in the Beaumont. Restaurants and bars close at three in the morning, and most of the personnel working those late hours are long gone. One area of management that works round the clock is the accounting department. Literally thousands of billings are tabulated—restaurant slips, room service, bar bills, telephone calls, all charged to a guest's room account.

Checking Claudia Shadu through accounting indicated that no dinner had been charged to room service, but it turned out she had dined in the Grill, alone as far as her charge was concerned. That didn't mean, of course, that she had been alone in the Grill, only that she had bought her own dinner. Jerry Dodd, getting that far toward answering Chambrun's questions, had tried to reach Mr. Quiller, the Maitre d' in the Grill, without any luck. Quiller is very much the ladies' man, and he'd have an eye for the beautiful Claudia Shadu and remember whether she'd been joined by someone, either for dinner or just table hopping. That would have to wait until Quiller was found.

The night bell captain and his crew knew Claudia well by sight, but so far Jerry had only been able to reach a few who had been on the early-evening shift. Those he had didn't remember seeing Claudia leave the hotel. The one final piece of information Jerry was able to dig up at that time came from the telephone switchboard. There was only one out-going call from 16B after six o'clock, when Shadu had talked to his wife—the overseas call to Kambashi at 3:04 A.M. The call to the head of the Kambashi authorities, Shadu talking to his secret-service man.

Claudia obviously hadn't tried to find company for the evening when she learned her husband was going to be tied up. There were no records of in-calls. If any calls had come to Claudia from the outside Jerry had no way of checking.

One of the guests in the Beaumont that morning was an old friend of Chambrun's named Harper Wilson. Wilson is State Department, spending a good deal of his time in New York when the U.N. is in session. He didn't sound pleased at being called at a

quarter to six in the morning, but Chambrun was his friend. Chambrun said he would order up a breakfast snack for him. Wilson said he would probably cut out Chambrun's heart when he got down and eat it for breakfast. He changed his mind when he arrived, looking a little tousled.

Chambrun's snack consisted of grilled ham, a mushroom omelette, gluten toast with sweet butter and strawberry jam imported from Devonshire. There was orange juice and strong American coffee. Wilson was mollified. He was a shaggy blond in his late forties with a kind of radiating good humor. He turned serious, however, as he listened to what Chambrun had to tell him.

There were just the three of us in the office. Shadu had gone back to his suite, hoping some word might come directly there.

"You've been told one certain fact," Wilson said. "Kambashi will never give up its political prisoners." He sighed, happily. "This omelette is perfection, Pierre."

"Everything in this hotel is perfection," Chambrun said, "except what has happened to Claudia Shadu."

"The New Revolution means terror," Wilson said. "But the government of Kambashi is just another kind of terror. Violence and murder are the common denominators of both sides. One woman's life is meaningless to both sides. Powers is right, you know. If he pays the ransom money without the prisoners being released, he won't get his daughter back and he'll simply have helped finance one side in an endless war."

"Stalemate," Chambrun said.

"Dead end," Wilson said.

"What are these long night sessions Shadu is involved in at the U.N.?" Chambrun asked.

"How to block peace in the Middle East," Wilson said. "Kambashi cannot exist in a peaceful world. Not the present government."

"Nice people."

Wilson looked regretfully at his empty breakfast plate. "Don't forget, Pierre, your Mr. Shadu, in spite of the romance of his wedding in these sacred halls, in spite of his exquisite manners and his Oxford accent, was one of the leaders in a bloodbath that brought the present Kambashi regime to power."

Chambrun's heavy eyelids lifted and he stared thoughtfully at Wilson.

At that moment the office door opened and Ruysdale came in.

"You asked for these, Mr. Chambrun," she said, and handed him some large file cards.

I recognized them at once as registration cards. On every normal morning after his usual nine o'clock breakfast Chambrun was presented with the registration cards from the previous day. Guests of the Beaumont might have been mildly disturbed if they had known how far into their privacy these cards went. There was a credit rating, of course. You don't stay at the Beaumont on pin money. There was other more personal information, indicated by letters, such as A for alcoholic, WX for woman chaser, MX for man chaser on a woman's card, MXX for a man double-crossing his wife, WXX for a woman double-crossing her husband.

Some cards had the letters PC in the lower right-hand corner. That meant that Pierre Chambrun had special information about the guest that was not for general consumption.

Chambrun flipped through the cards that Ruysdale had brought as if they didn't particularly interest him. Nevertheless he put one aside.

"Does the Kambashi mission to the U.N. have a headquarters somewhere?" he asked Wilson. "The Shadus are the only people from that country in the hotel."

"East Sixty-First Street," Wilson said. "I can get you the exact address."

"Please do," Chambrun said.

There was some kind of commotion in the outer office. I heard Miss Ruysdale protesting and an angry male voice shouting at her. The door burst open and a raging gray-haired man, a giant of a man, bulled his way in.

"Chambrun?" He looked from one to the other of us.

"I am Pierre Chambrun," Chambrun said. "This is Harper Wilson from the State Department, and this is Mark Haskell, my assistant. What can I do for you, Mr. Powers?"

I suppose I should have recognized him. His pictures appeared in the public prints often enough.

"You and your confounded meddling in other people's affairs!" Powers shouted. "Do you know what's happened now? Do you know the result of sending that F.B.I. twerp to my hotel?"

"The kidnapers have raised their demands," Chambrun said quietly.

"You're damn right! Doubled their demands!"

"How did they know the F.B.I. had gone to see you?"

"Because they're watching me, of course. Watching me every second!" He had looked like a man bent on violence when he came in, but now Powers gazed around him, almost helplessly, and sank down in one of the green leather armchairs. "This is beyond enduring, Mr. Chambrun." His voice was shaken.

"You care about your daughter?" Chambrun seemed not to move a muscle.

"Of course I care about her, for God's sake!"

"You would pay the ransom?"

"Yes! Yes, if it would set her free. But the Kambashi people will never release those prisoners. Ask your State Department genius." He glanced at Wilson.

Wilson nodded without speaking.

"Tell me about your first conversation with the kidnapers," Chambrun said.

"They called me in the middle of the night," Powers said. "They told me they had Claudia and what the ransom terms were. I was to get up the money for them and use my influence to persuade the Kambashi government to release the prisoners. I know the Kambashi people. I've had dealings with them, God help me."

"The expropriation of your business there?"

"Yes. I—I insisted on talking to Claudia. They put her on the phone." Powers's voice broke. "It—it was the first time I'd heard her voice since she was married to that monster, Shadu."

"Monster?"

"He was at the head of the conspiracy to steal my property in Kambashi. I sometimes think Claudia married him to hurt me. But now she was frightened. She begged me to help her. Of course I said I would. Then the kidnaper came back on. Conditions. Under no circumstances must I get in touch with the police or any other law-enforcement agency. They would kill Claudia if I did. That's why I shut you off before. I—I had to play it their way."

"Then they called you again?"

"After Lewis came to my hotel. A last chance. Ten million now. Or else."

"How are you to deliver it?" Chambrun asked.

"Arrange at the bank. Go there at ten this morning. Come out with the money in a suitcase. Wander around until they are sure I'm not being watched or followed. Then I will be relieved of it."

"And your daughter?"

"If I don't double-cross them she will be set free."

"And the prisoners in Kambashi?"

Powers moistened his lips. "They didn't mention them that second time." He sounded puzzled.

"Too dazzled at the thought of ten million dollars," Chambrun said, a tight little smile moving his lips. "There is no reason you should take my advice, Mr. Powers, but I offer it."

"Well?"

"Follow instructions. Go to the bank at ten o'clock this morning. Come out with the suitcase, but have nothing in it but old newspapers. Let it be taken from you."

"And then they will kill Claudia!"

"I think I can guarantee she will be safe," Chambrun said.

It is not unusual in my relationship with Chambrun to find myself not understanding what in the world he is talking about. How could he guarantee Claudia Shadu's safety? Beyond that, how could he guarantee it in the next three hours?

Mine not to reason why. He would explain when he was ready to explain. I remember Powers looked dazed, as though he found himself talking to some kind of lunatic. He agreed he would go to the Eastern National Bank at ten o'clock. He would come out with the suitcase. I had a feeling it would contain money, not newspapers. He wasn't going to follow Chambrun's advice. I said that to Chambrun.

"Perhaps we'll be in time whatever he does," Chambrun said. He turned to Wilson. "The address for the Kambashi delegation, please."

I was instructed to meet him in the lobby in ten minutes. We were going out.

The house rented by the Kambashi delegation on East 61st Street was not far from the Beaumont. We walked there on a bright summer morning. I didn't ask him why he was wearing a raincoat. You don't ask him "why" anything. It was about 8:15 when we rang the doorbell of a remodeled brownstone. What I supposed was the Kambashi flag hung out over the front door. After a considerable pause the door opened as far as an inside chain lock would allow, and a black face looked out at us.

"I want to talk to the person in charge," Chambrun said. "You can tell them it is about Mrs. Shadu."

The door was abruptly closed. After a wait of at least three

minutes it was opened wide and we walked in. The man who had opened the door was a white-coated servant. In the arched doorway across the entrance hall a handsome black man was drying his lips with a linen napkin.

"Mr. Chambrun!" he said, with a wide smile. "I have seen you many times in your delightful hotel." His British accent was almost as impeccable as Shadu's. "I can understand how distressed you must be over this unfortunate Shadu affair. Happening in your hotel! How can I help you? Won't you and your friend join me in coffee? I was just finishing breakfast."

We followed him through the arch into a dining room. Two others of his countrymen were at the table. They rose.

"My name is Raschid," the host said. "Unfortunately my colleagues do not speak English. I take it you are not familiar with the language of Kambashi?"

"Unfortunately," Chambrun said.

"Please sit down," Raschid said. "Tell me what I can do."

"You can tell Mrs. Shadu that I have come to take her to her father," Chambrun said. He made no move to sit down.

"I don't think I understand," Raschid said. The smile was gone.

"I'm quite sure you do," Chambrun said.

The two men who didn't speak English were on their feet. They and Raschid started to move toward us. Then I understood why Chambrun was wearing a raincoat. From the right-hand pocket he produced a very efficient-looking .38 caliber police special which he aimed directly at Raschid's heart.

"Take a look out the window, Mr. Raschid," he said. "You will see a small army of F.B.I. agents waiting to come in after me if I don't emerge in five minutes with Mrs. Shadu."

Raschid went to the window. When he turned back I saw little beads of sweat on his forehead.

"It was rather clever to demand the release of political prisoners," Chambrun said. "Nobody would dream that it was the Kambashi government blackmailing Mr. Powers. You have three minutes in which to produce Mrs. Shadu ready to leave. Let's not play games, shall we?"

One of the men who didn't speak English left the room, without, I might say, any instructions from Raschid.

"Shadu couldn't warn you that I was coming," Chambrun said. "I had his phone disconnected and a guard placed outside the door of his suite."

"We have diplomatic immunity," Raschid said.

"But you have kidnaped an American citizen and we dislike that sort of thing. Of course Mrs. Shadu may be willing to admit that it was all just a joke on her father. A ten-million-dollar joke."

"Those F.B.I. men won't dare come in here. It would create an international incident," Raschid said.

"I'm sure they'll apologize afterwards," Chambrun said.

A very beautiful woman appeared in the doorway. Claudia Shadu looked cool and unhysterical.

"I'm not going to forget this, Mr. Chambrun," she said.

"I trust, for the sake of your immortal soul, that you don't," Chambrun said. "Please come with me."

She went with us, out onto the street. None of it made the slightest sense to me. I looked around for the F.B.I. men and didn't see anyone. Chambrun smiled at me.

"I'm sure everyone Raschid saw out here on the street looked like an F.B.I. man to him," he said. "There are none, of course."

"Damn you!" Claudia Shadu whispered.

Chambrun hailed a taxi and the three of us crowded into the back seat. Chambrun glanced at his watch and gave the address of the Eastern National Bank.

"It was an ingenious way to squeeze a fortune out of your father," Chambrun said, after a moment of silence. "There were two unfortunate slips, though."

"What slips?" She was trembling with anger.

"When Lewis, the F.B.I. man, went to see your father at his hotel, only three people knew he was going. I knew, Mark here knew, and your husband. Lewis isn't an amateur. He didn't walk into that hotel telling everyone who he was. The only person who could have notified the kidnapers was your husband."

She said something under her breath.

"The second slip was the failure to mention the prisoners the second time they talked to your father. The prisoners were meant to keep us from suspecting the Kambashi government, but the prisoners were forgotten in the excitement of knowing that your father would deliver them a fortune."

"How did you know I was there?" Claudia asked.

"Where else? On 'foreign soil,' in diplomatic terms. A place safe from search. But there was something else, Mrs. Shadu, something that confirmed my solution." From his pocket Chambrun took one of those registration cards. "When any guest registers at

the Beaumont," he said; "we prepare a dossier on him. Some people might think it's an invasion of privacy. But it's for our security. This is your card. You see? Unlimited credit. Naturally, with the Kambashi government behind your husband and your father behind you. But in the lower corner here you see my initials—PC?"

"That means I had information on you in my private files. I checked. The information I had was that you had an international reputation as a practical joker—sometimes as a vicious practical joker. The hotel was warned against your kind of pranks and games. So, when I put the three things together, I had the answer."

The cab stopped outside the Eastern National Bank. It was almost ten o'clock. We sat there watching until Joshua Powers emerged carrying a suitcase.

"I don't care what you tell him or how you explain this," Chambrun said to Claudia Shadu. "Your family feuds don't concern me. But I will sit here till I see him take that suitcase back into the bank."

She got out of the cab and ran across the sidewalk toward her father.

"God save us all from vengeful children," Chambrun said. Then he made an impatient gesture. "Damn it, Mark, we're late for work."

"Q"

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